

ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

Ancient Civilizations offers a comprehensive and straightforward account of the world's first civilizations and how they were discovered, drawing on many avenues of inquiry including archaeological excavations, surveys, laboratory work, highly specialized scientific investigations, and both historical and ethnohistorical records.

This book covers the earliest civilizations in Eurasia and the Americas, from Egypt and the Sumerians to the Indus Valley, Shang China, and the Maya. It also addresses subsequent developments in Southwest Asia, moving on to the first Aegean civilizations, Greece and Rome, the first states of sub-Saharan Africa, divine kings and empires in East and Southeast Asia, and the Aztec and Inka empires of Mesoamerica and the Andes. It includes a number of features to support student learning: a wealth of images, including several new illustrations; feature boxes which expand on key sites, finds, and written sources; and an extensive guide to further reading. With new perceptions of the origin and collapse of states, including a review of the issue of sustainability, this fifth edition has been extensively updated in the light of spectacular new discoveries and the latest theoretical advances.

Examining the world's pre-industrial civilizations from a multidisciplinary perspective and offering a comparative analysis of the field which explores the connections between all civilizations around the world, this volume provides a unique introduction to pre-industrial civilizations in all their brilliant diversity. It will prove invaluable to students of Archaeology.

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>xxxiii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xxxv</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xxxix</i>

PART I Background 1

Chapter 1	The Study of Civilization	3
	What Is a “Civilization”? 6	
	Comparing Civilizations	8
	Civilizations and Their Neighbors	9
	“Primary” and “Secondary” Civilizations	11
	The Rediscovery of Ancient Civilizations	12
	The Threat to Ancient Civilizations	23
Chapter 2	Theories of States	26
	Historical and Anthropological Perspectives	29
	Four Classic Theories for the Emergence of State Societies	33
	Coercive Power versus Collective Action	40
	Cultural Systems and Civilization	41
	Ecological Theories	42
	Social Theories	43
	Cycling Chiefdoms: Processes and Agents	49
	The Collapse of Civilizations	52
	Civilization and Sustainability	54
	Western and Indigenous Science	59

PART II The First Civilizations 63

	Prelude to Civilization: First Villages in the Fertile Crescent	63
Chapter 3	Mesopotamia: The First Cities (3500–2000 B.C.)	69
	The Setting	72
	Irrigation and Alluvium: Hassuna, Samarra, Halaf, and Ubaid (6500–4200 B.C.)	73
	The Uruk Revolution (4200–3100 B.C.)	76
	The Early Dynastic Period (2900–2334 B.C.)	89
	The Akkadian Empire (2334–2190 B.C.)	99
	Imperial Ur (2112–2004 B.C.)	102
	Wider Horizons (2500–2000 B.C.)	104

Chapter 4	Egyptian Civilization	109
	Kmt: “The Black Land”	110
	Origins (5000–3100 B.C.)	114
	The Archaic Period (3100–2680 B.C.): Kingship, Writing, and Bureaucracy	124
	The Old Kingdom (2680–2134 B.C.): Territorial and Divine Kingship	129
	The First Intermediate Period (2134–2040 B.C.)	139
	The Middle Kingdom (2040–1640 B.C.): The Organized Oasis	139
	The Second Intermediate Period (1640–1550 B.C.)	141
	The New Kingdom (1550–1070 B.C.): Imperial Kings	142
	The Transformation of Egypt (after 1100 B.C.)	151
Chapter 5	South Asia: The Indus Civilization	156
	The Origins of Village Life	159
	Early Harappan (4000–2600 B.C.)	161
	Mature Harappan: The Indus Civilization (2600–1900 B.C.)	163
	Farming Villages of the Indus and Ganges (2000–600 B.C.)	175
	Early Historic Cities (600–150 B.C.)	176
Chapter 6	The First Chinese Civilizations	180
	Setting	183
	Millet and Rice (c. 7000–3500 B.C.)	183
	Liangzhu (c. 3300–2300 B.C.)	185
	Ritual and Pilgrimage: The Niuheliang Temple (c. 3500 B.C.)	187
	Elite Traditions in the Longshan Phase (c. 2800–1800 B.C.)	187
	Shimao and the Northern Zone (c. 2300–1800 B.C.)	189
	Three Dynasties: Xia, Shang, and Zhou (c. 1800–1046 B.C.)	191
	Beyond the Shang: Bronze Age Traditions in Other Regions of China	206
	The Western Zhou (1046–771 B.C.)	209
PART III	Great Powers in Southwest Asia	211
Chapter 7	Mesopotamia and the Levant (2000–1200 B.C.)	213
	Bronze Age Cities in Anatolia (2000–1700 B.C.)	214
	The Struggle for Mesopotamia (2000–1800 B.C.)	217
	The World of the Mari Letters (1810–1750 B.C.)	219
	The Emergence of Babylon and the Old Babylonian Period (2004–1595 B.C.)	221

	The Rise of the Hittites (1650–1400 B.C.)	224
	Egypt and Mitanni: War in the Levant (1550–1400 B.C.)	227
	The Hittites in the Levant (1400–1200 B.C.)	228
	The Hittites in Anatolia (1400–1200 B.C.)	231
	Mesopotamia and Iran (1400–1200 B.C.)	234
Chapter 8	Southwest Asia in the First Millennium B.C.	237
	A Reordered World (1200–1000 B.C.)	238
	The Mediterranean Coastlands (1000–700 B.C.)	240
	The Archaeology of Empire	246
	Assyria Resurgent (911–680 B.C.)	248
	The Mountain Kingdom of Urartu (c. 830–600 B.C.)	250
	The Assyrian Apogee (680–612 B.C.)	251
	The Neo-Babylonian Empire (612–539 B.C.)	255
	Phrygians and Lydians (750–500 B.C.)	257
	The Rise of the Persians (614–490 B.C.)	259
PART IV	The Mediterranean World	263
Chapter 9	The First Aegean Civilizations	265
	The Aegean Early Bronze Age (3200–2100 B.C.)	269
	Mainland Greece and the Cycladic Islands	270
	Minoan Civilization: The Palace Period (2100–1450 B.C.)	272
	Crete and Its Neighbors	281
	Mycenaean Greece (1600–1050 B.C.)	282
	After the Palaces: Postpalatial Greece (1200–1050 B.C.)	293
Chapter 10	The Mediterranean World in the First Millennium (1000–30 B.C.)	297
	The Recovery of Greece (1000–750 B.C.)	298
	Phoenicians and Carthaginians (1000–750 B.C.)	301
	The Greek Colonies (800–600 B.C.)	302
	Etruscan Italy (900–400 B.C.)	305
	Archaic Greece (750–480 B.C.)	310
	Three Greek Cities: Athens, Corinth, Sparta	312
	Classical Greece (480–323 B.C.)	316
	Sequel: The Hellenistic World	325
Chapter 11	Imperial Rome	330
	The Roman Republic (510–31 B.C.)	333
	The Early Roman Empire (31 B.C.–A.D. 235)	334
	The Culture of Empire	336

The Military Establishment	339
Arteries of Empire: Roads and Sea-Lanes	342
Cities	345
The End of the Ancient World	357

PART V Northeast Africa and Asia 359

The Erythraean Sea	359
Chapter 12 Northeast Africa: Kush, Meroe, and Aksum	363
Nubia and the Middle Nile	365
Camels and Monsoons	377
Meroe (c. 300 B.C.–A.D. 300)	378
Aksum (A.D. 100–1100)	381
Chapter 13 Sub-Saharan Africa	386
Jenné-jeno (Third Century B.C. to Early First Millennium A.D.)	390
Sahel States: Ghana, Mali, and Songhay	393
The East African Coast: Monsoons and Stone Towns	396
The Far Interior: Interlacustrine Kingdoms	399
South Central Africa: Gold and Ivory	400
West African Forest Kingdoms	406
Chapter 14 Divine Kings in Southeast Asia	411
The Rise of States in Southeast Asia (c. 2000 B.C.–A.D. 150)	412
The Angkor State (A.D. 802–1430)	420
Collapse	429
Chapter 15 Kingdoms and Empires in East Asia (770 B.C.–A.D. 700)	432
Society Transformed: The Eastern Zhou Period (770–221 B.C.)	434
The First Chinese Empire (221–206 B.C.)	438
The Han Empire (206 B.C.–A.D. 220)	442
Secondary States: Korea and Japan	454

PART VI Early States in the Americas 459

Chapter 16 Lowland Mesoamerica	461
Mesoamerica	463
Village Farmers (c. 7000–2000 B.C.)	467
The Formative Period: The Olmec (1500–500 B.C.)	469
Preclassic Maya Civilization (before 1100 B.C.–A.D. 200)	475
Classic Maya Civilization (A.D. 200–900)	480

	The Ninth-Century Collapse	500
	Postclassic Lowland Maya Civilization (A.D. 900–1517): Chichen Itzá and Mayapan)	504
Chapter 17	Highland Mesoamerica	509
	The Rise of Highland Civilization (2000–500 B.C.)	510
	Monte Albán (500 B.C.–A.D. 750)	514
	Teotihuacán (200 B.C.–A.D. 600)	519
	The Toltecs (c. A.D. 800–1150)	528
	The Rise of Aztec Civilization (A.D. 1200–1519)	532
	Tenochtitlán (A.D. 1487–1519)	534
	The Spanish Conquest (A.D. 1517–1521)	545
Chapter 18	The Foundations of Andean Civilization	548
	The Andean World: Poles of Civilization	549
	The Preceramic Period (3000–1800/1200 B.C.)	552
	The “Maritime Foundations” Hypothesis	559
	The Initial Period (1800–800 B.C.)	561
Chapter 19	Andean States (200 B.C.–A.D. 1534)	578
	The Early Intermediate Period (200 B.C.–A.D. 600)	580
	North Coast: Moche Civilization (A.D. 100–700)	581
	Southern Pole: Nasca (A.D. 100–c. A.D. 700)	595
	The Middle Horizon: The First Highland States (A.D. 600–1000)	598
	The Late Intermediate Period (A.D. 1000–1400)	602
	The Late Horizon: The Inka Empire (A.D. 1476–1534)	606
Chapter 20	Epilogue	617
	Similar but Different	618
	Interconnectedness	620
	Volatility	622
	The Stream of Time	622
	<i>Guide to Further Reading</i>	625
	<i>References</i>	651
	<i>Credits</i>	653
	<i>Index</i>	659



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FIGURES

1.0	Assyrian King Assurbanipal (668–627 B.C.) hunting lions, a scene depicted in this relief carved panel from his palace at Nineveh in Iraq.	3
1.1	The distribution of early preindustrial civilizations.	5
1.2	Victim of falling ash at the Roman city of Pompeii in southern Italy, destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79.	14
1.3	Among the adventurers who descended on the Nile in the early nineteenth century was Giovanni Belzoni (1778–1823), a former circus strongman, seen here transporting a head of pharaoh Ramesses II to the Nile.	15
1.4	Austen Henry Layard supervises the removal of a winged bull from an Assyrian palace at Nimrud in northern Iraq in 1847.	16
1.5	Reconstruction of the “Royal Grave” of Pu-abi at Ur in southern Iraq, excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley in 1922.	17
1.6	The Maya center at Uxmal in Mexico, painted by Frederick Catherwood in 1844.	21
1.7	The capture of the Inka capital of Cusco in Peru in 1533, from an engraving published in Frankfurt in 1602.	22
1.8	Damaged remains of the ancient desert city of Palmyra in Syria, recaptured from so-called Islamic State in April 2016.	24
2.0	The goddess Ma’at, goddess of Truth and Harmony, spreads her protective wings in Queen Nefertari’s tomb in the Valley of the Queens in southern Egypt. Dynasty XIX, 1198 B.C.	26
2.1	Aztec warriors and their prisoners. These richly caparisoned warriors were an elite class in Aztec society, rising through the ranks by capturing enemies on the field. Many of their prisoners (seen here) perished on temple altars.	28
2.2	Utimuni, nephew of Shaka Zulu, in warrior uniform. Painting by George French Agnes, 1849.	51
3.0A	Carved stone pillar from Göbekli Tepe in southeast Turkey, tenth millennium B.C. The intensive collecting of wild grain at sites such as this may have led to the adoption of agriculture.	64
3.0B	Statue of the Sumerian scribe Abikhil, superintendent of the temple at Mari, c. 2600 B.C.	69
3.1	Map of ancient Southwest Asia. The “Fertile Crescent” is indicated in grey.	72
3.2	Clay tablet with cuneiform script recording details of crops and fields, c. 2800 B.C.	76

3.3	Plan of Uruk, showing the Kullaba and Eanna precincts.	79
3.4	Settlement patterns of the Akkadian period in southern Mesopotamia, from the survey by Robert McC. Adams and his team.	80
3.5	Cylinder seal and rolled-out seal impression. Cylinder seals first appeared in the Late Uruk period; these are distinctively Mesopotamian artifacts that consist of a small cylinder of stone carved with the reverse impression of a miniature figurative scene and often the name of an owner or official. The seal was designed to be rolled out on the surface of soft clay in order to leave a clear "signature." Along with writing, they show the concern for administration and control in the early cities of Mesopotamia. Cylinder seal impressions marked clay writing tablets (as evidence of their authenticity) and sealed jars, chests, or doorways. The carving of the miniature scenes was an intricate and sophisticated process. The scenes themselves are a useful source of information, including as they do gods and heroes, episodes from myths and legends, and everyday items like livestock or buildings. Cylinder seals remained in use throughout a wide area of Southwest Asia from the fourth millennium to the first millennium B.C. They also occur in foreign lands visited by Mesopotamian merchants, such as Egypt and the Indus.	83
3.6	Plan of a 50-meter by 50-meter (164-foot by 164-foot) square excavated at Tell Abu Salabikh in southern Iraq, showing the division into streets, courtyards, and roofed spaces.	85
3.7A	Map showing the extent of Uruk influence in Southwest Asia.	87
3.7B	Plan of Habuba Kabira, a possible Uruk colony on the banks of the River Euphrates in northern Syria. The regular layout of the settlement suggests it was a planned town. A massive mud-brick wall with towers protects it on three sides (with the Euphrates river on the fourth), and access to the interior is through two heavily defended gates. The inhabitants of Habuba Kabira were clearly concerned about safety, which is natural if they were south Mesopotamian settlers living in a foreign land.	88
3.8	The Stele of the Vultures, commissioned by Eannatum, ruler of Lagash, c. 2450 B.C. Heavily armed infantry, with spears, shields, and helmets, advance in phalanx formation, trampling underfoot the corpses of their enemies. Such stelae proclaim the power and militarism of the Early Dynastic kingdoms.	93
3.9A	Gold and lapis bull-head lyre from Pu-abī's tomb.	95

3.9B	Plan of Pu-abi's tomb and death pit	96
3.10	Head of an Akkadian ruler, the supposed Sargon of Akkad (third millennium B.C., bronze). Imperial ideology and charismatic leadership were two of the most striking features of the Akkadian empire and had a profound effect on later Mesopotamian dynasties. From this time on, ambitious Mesopotamian rulers sought to have themselves portrayed in public monuments as heroic and godlike individuals, deserving reverence from their subjects. The head had been placed for safekeeping in the central Bank in Baghdad and survived the looting of the Iraq Museum in April 2003. Iraq Museum, Baghdad, Iraq.	100
3.11	Reconstruction of the Ur ziggurat. The most impressive remains at Ur today are those of the great ziggurat, the massive stepped pyramid dedicated to the moon god Nanna. It was built by Ur-Nammu (2112–2094 B.C.), founder of the powerful Third Dynasty of Ur. Ur-Nammu's ziggurat proved to be the first in a long tradition, stretching into the Neo-Babylonian period (605–539 B.C.). Its origin lay in a brick platform built to raise temples above the surrounding city houses. Such platforms are seen at Eridu as early as the Ubaid period, but as time went by they became grander and more impressive. The ziggurat was a logical culmination, consisting not only of a single platform but also of a whole series of superimposed platforms, with a temple on the summit. The idea may have been to raise the temple closer to the sky, where the gods were thought to live. This is reflected in the biblical story of the tower of Babel, which is clearly a reference to the famous ziggurat of Babylon. It also placed the scene of the ceremonies far above the ordinary populace, who could only watch and wonder from a distance.	103
3.12	Carved vessel in soft stone from Susa, in lowland Elam. The vessel consists of two conjoined compartments, and the outer surfaces are carved with the representation of a reed-built house, complete with door and windows. Such houses have been traditional among the Marsh Arabs of southern Iraq and southwestern Iran down to recent times, and emphasize the dual character of the Elamite state, straddling the lowland plains and the Iranian plateau. Mid-third millennium B.C. Paris: Musée du Louvre.	107
4.0	Khafre, builder of the second pyramid at Giza c. 2560 B.C.	109
4.1	Map of sites and geographical features.	111
4.2	Egypt before the state: pottery vessels of the fourth millennium B.C.; the representation of the reed boat, with banners and shelters amidships, is a frequent theme and illustrates the importance of the River Nile as an artery of trade and communication.	118

4.3	Approximate positions of known chiefdoms in predynastic Egypt, c. 3300 B.C.	121
4.4	The Narmer palette, a slab of slate found at Nekhen (Hierakonpolis) in Upper Egypt carved on both sides with scenes that commemorate King Narmer. (a) Narmer is wearing the white crown. He carries a pear-shaped mace head in his right hand and is about to smite a captive. A falcon head (the southern Horus) emerges from papyrus reeds, carrying a human head above the victim. A sandal bearer follows the king, who stands on two dead enemies. (b) Narmer is wearing the red crown (top), as he inspects rows of decapitated enemies, accompanied by two high officials. The central design of intertwined animals symbolizes harmony, balancing images of conquest in the upper and lower registers. At the bottom, a bull destroys a city wall and tramples on its enemies. First Dynasty, c. 3100 B.C.; greywacke, height 63 cm.	123
4.5	Egyptian writing is referred to as hieroglyphic from the hieroglyphs, the familiar symbols that appear in formal inscriptions and on tomb walls. In fact, Egyptian scribes developed cursive hands used in everyday life. These examples show formal hieroglyphic script (top line) and below it both the cursive script and the scribe's shorthand, which was used for rapid writing.	127
4.6	Step Pyramid complex of King Djoser at Saqqara. The stepped pyramid stood at the heart of an enclosure that served as an elaborate setting for public ceremonies that symbolized the king's role as supreme ruler. The enclosure wall was built to imitate the facade of a royal palace.	130
4.7A	The Pyramids of Giza, built by successive Old Kingdom pharaohs Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure in the twenty-sixth century B.C.	132
4.7B	Pyramid of Menkaure at Giza, showing remains of the original smooth casing stones that covered the sides.	133
4.8	The Sphinx at Giza, modeled from a bedrock outcrop by Khafre c. 2560 B.C.	135
4.9	Egyptian tomb model showing the noble Meketre inspecting his livestock. Meketre served as High Steward under several Egyptian pharaohs at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom c. 1980 B.C.	138
4.10	The Temple of Amun at Karnak. (a) The columns of the Hypostyle Hall, completed by pharaoh Ramesses II; the column capitals are shaped in the form of lotus flowers, symbols of rebirth in ancient Egyptian religion. (b) The tall monolithic obelisks with their pyramidal tops were gradually engulfed as successive rulers added more courts and pylons to the temple.	145

4.11	Carved relief showing the pharaoh Akhenaten (c. 1351–1334 B.C.) with his wife Nefertiti and three daughters. Akhenaten's reign launched an entirely new, representational art style: realistic, with an emphasis on the royal family. This was part of a vigorous attempt to reduce the power of the Theban priesthood of Amun and to strengthen Akhenaten's own secular and spiritual power.	147
4.12	Elite housing in the short-lived Egyptian "new town" of Amarna founded by Akhenaten. This reconstruction shows flat-roofed, two-story houses within walled compounds that also contained beehive-shaped granaries and circular wells accessed by spiral ramps.	149
4.13	Tutankhamun's tomb. (a) The antechamber with its jumble of furnishings. (b) The golden sarcophagus of the king. Tutankhamun's tomb furniture was so opulent that it has taken generations for us to appreciate its wealth and significance. The dead pharaoh traveled through the heavens in the sun god's barque. His many gold leaf and inlaid figures and amulets ensured his well-being during the eternal journey. At the same time, his tomb provided for his material needs—clothing, perfume and cosmetics, personal jewelry, and chests to keep them in. There were chairs, stools, beds, headrests, weapons, and hunting gear. Baskets and vases contained food and wine. Even the pharaoh's chariots lay in pieces inside the tomb. The tomb provides a fleeting portrait of the fabulous wealth of Egypt's court.	150
4.14	Great Temple at Abu Simbel on the banks of the Nile in Lower Nubia, completed c. 1265 B.C. by Ramesses II as a statement of political power. The temple was moved to higher ground by UNESCO during the building of the Aswan Dam, which created Lake Nasser during the 1960s.	151
4.15	Estate workers working in the fields of Menna, scribe of the fields, and estate inspector under pharaoh Amenhotep III (1388–1350 B.C.) of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Tomb painting from Deir el-Medina, Western Thebes.	152
5.0	Terracotta figurine from the Indus city of Mohenjo-daro, Pakistan; third millennium B.C.	156
5.1	Map of archaeological sites.	158
5.2	Plan of the early village of Mehrgarh in Baluchistan.	161
5.3	View across the Citadel at Mohenjo-daro.	164
5.4	The Great Bath on the Citadel at Mohenjo-daro.	165
5.5	A street in Mohenjo-daro.	166
5.6	Indus civilization steatite seal showing carved image of an antelope with symbols of the undeciphered Indus script	

	above its back. In front of the animal is a ritual offering stand. Size: 2.3 × 2.3 centimeters.	167
5.7	Limestone sculpture of a bearded man, perhaps a priest or ruler, from Mohenjo-daro. Height: 19 centimeters (7.4 inches). The rarity and small size of such portrayals underline how unlike ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia, Indus political ideology seems to have discouraged the portrayal of powerful individuals.	170
5.8	Map of the extent of the Mauryan empire.	177
5.9	The Ruvanveliseya stupa at Anuradhapura, founded in the mid-second century B.C. and measuring over 100 meters (330 feet) in height. A chamber at its core held sacred relics. The size of the major stupas at Anuradhapura emphasizes the key role of Buddhist monasteries in upholding the power of the state and managing important sectors of the rural economy.	178
6.0	Bronze head from a ritual pit at Sanxingdui, China, c. 1200–1000 B.C.	180
6.1	The walled center of Liangzhu showing the moats and canals, the enclosure wall with water gates, the central Mojiaoshan palace platform, and the Fanshan cemetery of elite graves.	185
6.2	The early walled settlement of Shimao in northern China.	190
6.3	Retaining wall for the central platform at Shimao.	191
6.4	Map of major Shang period sites: Anyang, Panlongcheng, Erlitou, Zhengzhou, Qishan, Sanxingdui, Zhukaigou, Xingan.	193
6.5	Plan and reconstruction of one of the palace-temples at Erlitou.	195
6.6	Plan of the Shang city at Zhengzhou, showing palace platforms within the central walled compound, and workshops, cemeteries, and residential areas within the outer wall.	197
6.7	Anyang. (a) Diagram of urban cluster. (b) Plan of Xibeigang cemetery. (c) Reconstruction of Xiaotun house. (d) Diagram of shaft grave with single ramp.	198
6.8	Shang ritual vessels. (a) Diagram of food vessels, wine vessels, and water vessels with names. (b) Close-up of the animal-mask <i>taotie</i> motif.	205
6.9	Map of Shang period bronze traditions.	208
7.0	The god Sharruma embraces the Hittite king Tudhaliyas IV (c. 1237–1209 B.C.) in the rock-cut sanctuary of Yazilikaya near the Hittite capital Boghazköy.	213
7.1	Clay tablet probably from the Assyrian merchant colony at Kanesh: a private letter from one of the merchants.	217
7.2	Part of a wall painting from the palace of Zimri-Lim at Mari (c. 1760 B.C.) showing a sacrificial scene, restored by Paul François from thousands of tiny fragments. Scenes such	

	as this illustrate ceremonies and events that would have taken place at the palace and demonstrate the colorful decoration that once adorned the main rooms.	220
7.3	The palace of Zimri-Lim at Mari. Mesopotamian cities of the third millennium B.C. were dominated by major temples. The king drew much of his power from also being high priest. In the Old Babylonian period, this pattern changed: Royal power became more secular and not so dependent on religious sanction. This trend is reflected in the increased size and importance of royal palaces in cities of the second millennium. Best known is that at Mari, an enormous mud-brick complex covering 2.5 hectares (6 acres) and dating in its present form from the reign of Zimri-Lim (1780–1759 B.C.). Painted frescoes adorned courtyards and principal rooms. There were also storerooms, workshops, and private apartments. One room was an archive, containing over 15,000 clay tablets, which have revealed many details of palace life. They also show Mari as the center of an important kingdom, engaged in war and diplomacy with its powerful neighbors.	221
7.4	The Law Code of Hammurabi, a black basalt stele carved with 282 laws in cuneiform script. The scene shown here at the top of the stele features Hammurabi standing in prayer before the sun god Shamash, the Babylonian god who was also the god of justice; 1792–1750 B.C.	223
7.5	Plan of Boghazköy, ancient Hattusas, capital of the Hittite empire from c. 1650 to 1200 B.C. The Hittites were skilled in fortification and made excellent use of the rocky terrain to strengthen their defenses. On the eastern side is the Büyükkale or Great Citadel, where remains of an imperial Hittite archive have come to light. A major feature of Boghazköy was its many temples within the defensive circuit.	225
7.6	The Lion Gate at the Hittite capital of Boghazköy, formed by two massive monolithic blocks carved with lion figures guarding the entrance.	226
7.7	Map of the Southwest Asia in the mid-second millennium. The kingdom of Mitanni was defeated by the Hittites in the fourteenth century B.C. and became a vassal state within the expanding Hittite empire.	227
7.8	Amarna letter WAA 29791 excavated from the Egyptian royal archives at Amarna in Middle Egypt. This clay tablet bearing cuneiform script is a letter from Tushratta, king of Mitanni, to the Egyptian ruler Amenhotep III (reigned 1386–1349 B.C.). Tushratta seeks gifts of Egyptian gold from a land where he claims “gold is as plentiful as dirt.” Amenhotep III had married Tushratta’s daughter Tadukhepa who entered the Egyptian royal harem as one of his many wives. Such diplomatic marriages were a feature of interstate relationships during this period.	229

- 7.9 Relief carving from the Ramesseum, the mortuary temple of the pharaoh Ramesses II at Thebes in Egypt, depicting the king in battle against the Hittites at Kadesh. Both sides claimed victory, and though the Hittites had the upper hand neither they nor the Egyptians were able to gain undisputed supremacy over the Levantine city-states. 230
- 7.10A Relief of the “soldier gods” from the Hittite sanctuary of Yazilikaya. 231
- 7.10B Plan of sanctuary. The open-air sanctuary of Yazilikaya lies less than a mile to the northeast of the Hittite capital, Boghazköy. It consists of two rocky clefts carved with relief portraits of the Hittite pantheon. The figures are over 2 meters (6 feet, 6 inches) tall and are carved in continuous panels, as if in procession. The larger of the two decorated rock clefts, the so-called “Great Gallery,” has figures of sixty-three deities, with gods on the left and goddesses on the right. The two processions meet at the end of the gallery, where the chief god Teshub, “Weather God of Heaven,” meets his consort, Hapat. The name of each deity is given in hieroglyphs. The only human figure to appear in these scenes is King Tudhaliyas IV (c. 1237–1209 B.C.), who was responsible for the carving of both the great gallery and the smaller side gallery. In the great gallery Tudhaliyas is shown as a god himself, whereas in the small gallery he is embraced by the god Sharruma. The small gallery also has three rectangular niches in the walls, and it is conjectured that these were used for burial urns of Hittite rulers, possibly Tudhaliyas himself and his parents, Hattusilis III and Puduhepa. 232
- 7.11 Stamp seal of the Hittite official Tarhunta-piya, found in excavations at Kilise Tepe. He is carrying a bow, and his shoes (note the upward-pointing toes) are typically Anatolian in fashion. They illustrate the strong cultural links between the southern coastlands of Turkey and the Anatolian plateau, heartland of the Hittite empire. 234
- 7.12 The reconstructed entrance to the ziggurat at Choga Zanbil, the purpose-built capital founded by Elamite ruler Untash-Napirisha. Like the ziggurat of Ur, a thousand years earlier, this was a stepped monument culminating in a shrine to the god (in this case the principal Elamite god Inshushinak) on the topmost stage. The structure has a core of sun-dried bricks, finished off with a facing of baked bricks, 2 meters thick, to protect against erosion. In every tenth row are inserted bricks inscribed with cuneiform text recording that it was Untash-Napirisha who built this massive structure. 235
- 8.0 Assyrian King Assurnasirpal (883–859 B.C.), shaded by a parasol, receives the surrender of prisoners of war. Carved relief panel from the palace at Nimrud in Iraq. 237

8.1	The harbor of Byblos, on the coast of modern Lebanon, looking across toward the site of the ancient city. Already an important center for trade and commerce in the third and second millennium B.C., the Phoenician city of Byblos was eclipsed by its rivals, Tyre and Sidon, in the first millennium B.C. but has given us one of the earliest surviving alphabetic inscriptions, carved on the sarcophagus of its eleventh-century king Ahiiram (see Box 8.1).	242
8.2A	Limestone sarcophagus of Ahiiram, king of the Phoenician city of Byblos, eleventh century B.C. An inscription in alphabetic script runs around the outer edge of the lid.	243
8.2B	Phoenician inscription from the Ahiiram sarcophagus from Byblos.	243
8.2C	Phoenician alphabet with Hebrew, Greek, and modern English equivalents.	244
8.3	Plan of Phoenician city of Tyre with harbor works. Tyre was a major Phoenician port on the coast of modern Lebanon, an offshore island with sheltered anchorages to north and south. It was joined to the mainland only in the late fourth century B.C., when Alexander the Great built a causeway in order to capture the city.	245
8.4	Nimrud ivory found in the remains of Fort Shalmaneser, an Assyrian storehouse and military arsenal on the edge of ancient Nimrud. These ivories are of Phoenician origin and were probably taken by the Assyrians as booty or tribute. Pieces such as this, showing winged griffins (mythical beasts) and plants, were made as inlay for expensive pieces of furniture.	246
8.5	Map showing the expansion of the Assyrian empire under Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.), Sargon II (722–705 B.C.), and Assurbanipal (668–627 B.C.).	249
8.6	View of Van Kale, ancient Tushpa, the capital of the mountain kingdom of Urartu. Most of the visible buildings at the site are of more recent date, but they stand on large block foundations of the original Urartian fortress.	251
8.7	Reconstruction of one of the main reception rooms in the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh, showing the winged human-headed lion figures guarding the doorway, the painted relief sculptures on the lower walls, and the wall paintings above the frieze higher up. From Sir Austen Henry Layard <i>Monuments of Nineveh from Drawings Made on the Spot</i> (1849).	252
8.8	Archaeological survey north of Nineveh by Daniele Morandi Bonacossi and his team has charted changing population levels from the pre-urban Ubaid period (fifth millennium B.C.) until recent times, illustrating the peak of settlement density under the Assyrian empire.	254

xx Figures

8.9A	The Ishtar Gate built c. 575 B.C. by King Nebuchadnezzar at Babylon, reconstructed in 1930 in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.	256
8.9B	Glazed brick panel from the Ishtar Gate.	257
8.10	The "Tomb of Midas" at Gordion in western Turkey.	258
8.11	The Behistun relief, proclaiming the victory of the Persian King Darius I (522–486 B.C.) over his enemies, and presenting parallel inscriptions in Elamite, Old Persian, and Akkadian, a crucial key in the decipherment of cuneiform script.	260
9.0	The "Lily Prince" fresco from the Minoan palace of Knossos, Crete.	265
9.1	Map of the Bronze Age Aegean, showing sites on Crete, the Cyclades, and the Aegean coast of Turkey.	268
9.2	Cycladic marble figurine of the classic "folded arm" type. These figurines have sometimes been found in graves, though many have been looted from unknown locations for sale on the international antiquities market in recent decades. The high prices that they command have fueled the illegal traffic, and the looting has destroyed much of the evidence about their original purpose and significance. Traces of paint preserved on some figurines suggest that the surfaces may originally have been brightly colored, c. 2500 B.C.	271
9.3	Reconstruction of the palace of Knossos, Crete.	274
9.4	Bull-leaping (Toreador) fresco from the palace at Knossos, Crete, showing a man vaulting over the back of a charging bull and a woman standing behind with outstretched arms, waiting to catch him. Sir Arthur Evans assumed that white figures were female and reddish-brown figures were male but this attribution is now disputed, and the color conventions of Minoan art are not always clear. The figure on the left, grasping the horns of the bull, is wrongly reconstructed and probably comes from another fresco. Minoan, c. 1450–1400 B.C. Archaeological Museum, Heraklion, Crete, Greece.	275
9.5	Faience figurine of the so-called "Snake Goddess," found along with other cultic objects in a stone-lined storage container sunk into the floor of the one of the palace rooms at Knossos. Height 29.5 centimeters (11.6 inches), c. 1600 B.C.	278
9.6	Houses of the Late Bronze Age town of Akrotiri on the island of Santorini, preserved through being buried by the ash and pumice from the volcanic eruption of the late seventeenth century B.C.	280
9.7	Gold "Mask of Agamemnon" from the Shaft Graves at Mycenae. "I have gazed on the face of Agamemnon,"	

	telegraphed Heinrich Schliemann to the king of Greece in 1876 when he opened the fifth of the Shaft Graves at Mycenae. According to Homer, Mycenae was the seat of the Greek leader Agamemnon, who led the expedition against Troy. Just within the Cyclopean walls, Schliemann came upon five rectangular, rock-cut pits, which contained the remains of 19 individuals accompanied by lavish offerings of gold. A sixth was discovered by his assistant the following year. Some of the bodies had gold face-masks over the skulls. Schliemann, ever the romanticist, identified the finest of these as the "Mask of Agamemnon." We know now that this is a chronological impossibility. The Agamemnon who took part in the Trojan War must have reigned in the thirteenth century B.C. The leaders buried in the Shaft Graves lived some three centuries before, at the beginning of Mycenae's greatness. They provide graphic evidence for the rise of elite rulers in sixteenth-century Greece, an event that marks the opening of the Mycenaean period.	283
9.8	The Lion Gate at Mycenae, the principal entrance into the fortified citadel. The gate takes its name from the sculptural group above the entrance, which shows a pair of lions on either side of a pillar. What originally stood on top of the pillar is unknown, but the lions are clearly merely heraldic supporters in the overall scheme. Note the massive "Cyclopean" blocks used in both the gate and the wall to its left.	284
9.9A	Tiryns: plan of citadel showing its development during the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C., to the final phase (at bottom) when a banqueting hall was built among the ruins of the now-destroyed upper citadel.	286
9.9B	Tiryns: photo of archery casemates.	287
9.10	Clay tablets with Linear B script from the palace of Knossos (Crete). The smaller tablet records numbers of sheep, the larger one concerns the offering of oil to various deities. Archives of Linear B tablets have been found at Pylos and other Mycenaean sites on the Greek mainland, and also at Knossos on Crete where they reflect the adoption of Mycenaean Greek by the palace bureaucracy in place of the earlier Minoan script.	288
9.11	A modern replica of the Uluburun ship, laid on the seabed off the Turkish coast in 2006 to be the centerpiece of an archaeological park.	291
9.12	Fortifications of Troy VI. The <i>Iliad</i> tells of a war fought by the Achaeans (Greeks), led by Agamemnon, high king of Mycenae, against the city of Troy, near the Dardanelles at the northwest corner of Turkey. In the 1860s the site of Troy was identified with the mound of Hissarlik by British	

- archaeologist and local resident Frank Calvert. Heinrich Schliemann's excavations in the 1870s uncovered a series of Bronze Age settlements, stretching back into the third millennium B.C. Among them was a fortified citadel of Late Bronze Age date (Troy VI), contemporary with the Mycenaean citadels of Greece. Schliemann himself erroneously equated Homer's Troy with Troy II, a much earlier third millennium fortress; his assistant Dörpfeld corrected the chronology some years later. Troy VI suffered severe destruction around 1250 B.C., for which both earthquake and human assault are possible explanations. It is tempting to link this destruction with the legend of the Trojan War. The Mycenaeans may well have been raiding this coast in the thirteenth century B.C., and local strongpoints such as Troy would have been natural targets in such a conflict. The Greek legends of the Trojan War contain many elements borrowed from later periods, however, including the use of iron and the emphasis on the burial rite of cremation, as in the description of Patroclus's funeral. Inhumation was the standard rite in the Mycenaean period. Excavations by German archaeologist Manfred Korfmann in the 1990s showed that the Troy excavated by Schliemann was in fact only the citadel of a larger Late Bronze Age city. 294
- 10.0 The goddess Athena mourning the Athenian dead, a marble relief slab c. 470 B.C. discovered close to the Acropolis at Athens. 297
- 10.1 Graph of burials at Athens, 1100–450 B.C. A key feature of the rise of the Greek polis, or city-state, was the development of a new social ideology that emphasized the concept of citizenship, that is, that citizens enjoyed equal rights, regardless of wealth and rank. This was a marked change from the situation during previous centuries, when Greek society had been dominated by wealthy families and most of the people were dependent peasant laborers. British archaeologist Ian Morris has argued that in the case of Athens, the transition from the master-peasant stage to the citizen-polis was far from smooth and suffered at least one temporary reversal. He bases this conclusion on burial evidence from Athens and its surrounding area, where he notes the exclusion of certain groups, including children and the poor, from formal burial in cemeteries during the pre-polis period (eleventh to eighth centuries B.C.). Comparing the representation of children with that of adults, we see that the proportion of children rose during the eighth century B.C., along with an increase in the numbers of adults who had formal burials. This, Morris argues, indicates a trend toward citizens' burial, in which all citizens, whether rich or poor, have the right to cemetery

	interment. Several Greek cities (though not all) underwent a parallel process around the same time, resulting in the emergence of city-states at Corinth and other centers. At Athens, however, Morris shows that this pattern of change is reversed around 700 B.C., when burial reverts to the rich alone. The incipient rise of the Athenian polis seems thus to have been nipped in the bud. The resumption of the trend occurs only in the sixth century B.C., when there is a rapid increase in the numbers of both adult and child burials in Athenian cemeteries. This marks the final transition to the polis ideal, wherein the city-state was governed by, and on behalf of, the citizenship as a whole rather than by the wealthy families alone. The culmination of this process was the development of Athenian democracy shortly before 500 B.C.	300
10.2	Map of Greek colonies around the Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts.	303
10.3	The Etruscan cemetery of Banditaccia, near Cerveteri in northern Italy. (a) Circular burial mounds of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. (b) Aerial view of the cemetery, showing circular burial mounds and streets of terrace-like tombs. (c) Plan and elevation of the Tomba della Cornice (sixth century B.C.).	307
10.4A	Greek <i>kouros</i> . National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece.	311
10.4B	Distribution map of <i>kouroi</i> .	311
10.5	(a) Athenian black-figure vessel. Note the typical decorative "Greek key" frieze around the base (fifth century B.C.). Luisa Ricciarini/Bridgeman Images. (b) Athenian black-figure <i>skyphos</i> , c. 500–490 B.C. depicting on the left the mythical sphinx, with human head, lion body and wings of a bird.	315
10.6	Bronze helmet of "Corinthian" type from the Greek sanctuary at Olympia in the Peloponnese, late sixth century B.C. Greek infantrymen, heavily protected by bronze helmets, breastplates, and greaves, were a highly effective fighting force and successfully defeated the Persian invasion of 480–479 B.C.	316
10.7A	The Parthenon, the famous fifth-century Doric style temple on the Athenian Acropolis.	319
10.7B	Detail of the Parthenon frieze, showing young aristocrats riding in procession.	320
10.8	Greek land division around the city of Chersonesos (Crimea). The checkerboard division of territory dates to the late fourth century B.C. and may be connected with the switch to intensive cultivation of grapes for export. Arterial roads M, R, and X divided the territory into three major blocks, which were then subdivided by the transverse roads VII, XII, and XVII. A defensive tower stood at each	

	road intersection. The individual plots within these major divisions measured a regular 4.4 hectares (10.9 acres), and were themselves divided into vineyards, fruit orchards, and gardens. Approximately one half of the entire area appears to have been terraced for grape cultivation. Adapted from Joe Carter et al., "The Chora of Chersonesos in Crimea, Ukraine".	322
10.9	Map of Halieis and its surroundings, c. 300–30 B.C.	324
10.10	Greek houses at Olynthos: a city block and its residences.	326
11.0	Marble bust of the Roman emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117–138).	330
11.1	Map of the Roman Empire in the second century A.D.	334
11.2	Statue of Emperor Augustus in military regalia from Prima Porta, c. 20 B.C. Military success was an essential ingredient in the propaganda of imperial office. Many Roman emperors claimed to be constitutional rulers, supported by the Senate and people, but it was control of the army that formed the bedrock of their power.	335
11.3	Reconstruction of the Temple of the Divine Julius from the Forum of Julius, built by the emperor Augustus in memory of his adoptive father, the assassinated Julius Caesar.	337
11.4	(a) Map of Hadrian's Wall, on the northern frontier of Roman Britain. (b) The Roman fort at Housesteads; the wall itself can be seen continuing along the crest in the distance. The wall itself ran 117 kilometers (73 miles) from the mouth of the River Tyne in the east to the Cumbrian coast in the west. Along its length were milecastles (fortlets) at every mile with turrets (watchtowers) between. Larger forts such as Housesteads, which held units of 500 (or, in one case, 1,000) men, were located either on the wall itself or a few kilometers to its rear. This elaborate frontier defense was built on the orders of Emperor Hadrian in the 120s A.D.	341
11.5	(a) Graph and (b) map of the numbers and locations of Roman shipwrecks in the Mediterranean, fifteenth century B.C. to fifteenth century A.D. The rise and fall in the number of Mediterranean shipwrecks is a good indication of the health of the Roman economy (c) Reconstruction view of the harbor at Portus, the port of Rome from the first century A.D. The outer harbor with its long, curved harbor moles was built by the emperor Claudius (A.D. 41–54) but proved to be too exposed to storms; the hexagonal inner harbor was added by the emperor Trajan in A.D. 110–117. Goods offloaded at Portus were transferred to smaller boats and shipped via canals giving access to the River Tiber and thence to Rome. Major harbors such as Portus were provided with lighthouses to aid navigation.	344

11.6	Cities of the Roman Empire, showing their estimated population sizes. Largest of all was Rome itself, which may have been the first city in the Western world with almost a million inhabitants.	346
11.7	The Arch of Septimius Severus, dedicated A.D. 203 in the Forum in Rome in honor of his victories over the Parthians.	347
11.8	Plan of Pompeii, a Roman city preserved by ash fall from the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79.	347
11.9	The garden courtyard of the House of the Menander, one of the largest and most luxurious elite Roman residences at Pompeii.	349
11.10A	Colosseum, cut-away diagram.	350
11.10B	The Hunt: relief depicting gladiators fighting wild animals in a Roman amphitheater.	351
11.10C	The center of Rome in the early fourth century A.D., showing the Colosseum (left), with the Baths of Trajan (lower left) and the Temple of the Divine Claudius (upper left), and the Roman Forum (right).	351
11.11	(a) Map and stamp of Sestius amphorae. (b) Amphora label from Spain. Amphorae, large pottery vessels, were the standard containers for transport of a whole range of produce in the Roman world, including wine, olive oil, and a fermented fish sauce known as <i>garum</i> . Many amphorae were locally manufactured and stamped with the name of the estate owner. Hence, the mapping of archaeological finds of amphorae bearing that particular stamp can reveal the extent of distribution of one estate's produce. Such is the case with the Sestius amphorae produced near Cosa in Italy for wine export in the first century B.C. Some Spanish amphorae were even labeled in ink with the weight of the amphora and its contents, the name of the shipper, and an official export mark.	353
11.12	Hoard of 126 Roman gold coins (aurei) found at Didcot in southern England. They had been buried for safe-keeping in a pottery vessel, soon after A.D. 160, and would have represented a fortune, equivalent to over ten years' salary for a Roman soldier. Such coins were not intended for everyday market transactions but were a means of storing life savings or capital. The Trustees of the British Museum.	354
11.13	The Lepidina letter: Vindolanda tablet LVII. Vindolanda Trust.	356
12.0	Nubian soldiers on the march in the tomb of Mesehti, a regional governor in Upper Egypt during the Middle Kingdom c. 2000 B.C. Equipped with bows and wearing red loincloths, these tomb figures illustrate the employment of Nubian soldiers in Egyptian armies.	363
12.1	Map of major trade routes across Asia and the Indian Ocean and sources of traded commodities.	366

12.2	The principal temple or Western deffufa at Kerma in the Sudan, early second millennium B.C.	370
12.3	A royal burial mound at Kerma. The people are hastening to complete the mound after the interment.	372
12.4	The Jebel Barkal temple, Nubia, founded by Egyptian pharaoh Tuthmosis III in the fifteenth century B.C. but rebuilt and expanded by Ramesses II two centuries later, and by the Nubian king Piye of Kush in the eighth century B.C.	375
12.5	General view of the royal pyramid cemeteries at Meroe in the Sudan, burial place of the kings and queens of the kingdom of Meroe from the third century B.C. to the fourth century A.D.	379
12.6	A royal stela at Aksum in Ethiopia, erected in honor of King Ezana II during the fourth century A.D. The decoration is in the form of false doors and windows, reproducing the appearance of a multi-storied palace façade. Height 21 meters (69 feet).	383
13.0	Traditional Zanzibar sailing dhow.	386
13.1	Map showing states and archaeological sites.	388
13.2	Artist's impression of the market at Jenné-jeno, c. A.D. 1000.	392
13.3	Ruler of Mali, said to be Musa Mansa, as depicted in the Catalan Atlas (c. A.D. 1375). He holds a golden orb and scepter, symbol of Mali's huge wealth.	395
13.4	The Grand Mosque at Kilwa in Tanzania. Kilwa was a major port and trade center between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries A.D.	398
13.5	Rhinoceros figure from Mapungubwe, covered with gold sheet.	402
13.6	The Conical Tower in the Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe. The solid stone tower is thought to be a depiction of a symbolic grain storage bin.	404
13.7	Bronze head from Ife.	408
13.8	A Benin <i>oba</i> (chief) and two warrior attendants depicted on a cast brass plaque that hung on the exterior of the palace at Benin.	409
14.0	A tree enveloping a temple building at Ta Prohm, Cambodia.	411
14.1	Map of archaeological sites described in Chapter 14.	413
14.2	Angkor Wat in Cambodia, a temple built by Khmer ruler Suryavarman II in the early twelfth century A.D. as a representation of the Hindu universe.	422
14.3	Paved causeway at Angkor Wat.	423
14.4	Detail of the frieze of the Apsaras (dancing girls) from Angkor Wat.	424

14.5	The Bayon at Angkor Thom in Cambodia, the temple-mortuary of Khmer ruler Jayavarman VII, late twelfth/early thirteenth century A.D.	427
15.0	An officer from the terracotta army of the first Chinese emperor Shihuangdi at Mount Lishan in China, late third century B.C.	432
15.1	Plan of the Eastern Zhou city of Yanxiadu.	435
15.2	Chinese circular coins, which became the standard type when the country was unified under the state of Qin (221 B.C.). The coins shown here were issued by the later Song Dynasty (A.D. 960–1279).	437
15.3	The tomb of Qin Shihuangdi, first emperor of China. (a) Plan of the tomb complex. (b) View of excavations in Pit 1 and ranks of terracotta soldiers. (c) Plan of Pit 2, containing war chariots, cavalry, and crossbowmen.	439
15.4	Map of the Qin and Han empires. The gray line illustrates the limits of the Qin empire; the shaded area shows the Han empire at its greatest extent.	443
15.5A	Jade burial suit of Liu Shen, King of Zhonghshan (died 113 B.C.), from his rock-cut chamber tomb at Mancheng, southeast of Beijing. Such burial suits are thought to have been manufactured in imperial Han workshops at Changan, the imperial capital, and were gifts from the Han emperor to subordinate rulers such as Liu Shen.	444
15.5B	Plan of the Mawangdui tomb. When Chinese archaeologists opened Tomb 1 at Mawangdui in central southern China, they came upon one of the best-preserved Han tombs ever discovered. Documents show that it was the resting place of Xin Xhui, the wife of Li Cang, Marquis of Dai, and chancellor of the kingdom of Changsha, who died around 180 B.C. The wooden burial chamber had been sealed in by layers of charcoal and white clay and was almost perfectly preserved; the flesh of the woman's body was still soft to the touch. She had died around age fifty from a heart attack brought on by acute pain from gallstones. In small compartments around the main burial chamber, archaeologists found hundreds of priceless luxury artifacts, including decorated silks, lacquerware trays and food bowls, cosmetic equipment, and tiny wooden figures playing musical instruments. One of the finest items was a T-shaped silk banner, painted with sun and moon and mythological scenes.	445
15.6	(a) Imperial landscape of the Qin and Han capitals. The imperial tombs of the earlier "Western Han" period were mainly located along the higher ground north of the Han capital Chang'an and the previous Qin capital Xianyang;	

	(b) the Yangling funerary complex of Han emperor Jing Di (156–141 B.C.) and Empress Wang. Around the emperor's pyramid mausoleum were eighty-one passages leading to the burial chamber and filled with numerous pottery figurines, weapons, horse trappings, and chariot fittings.	447
15.7	Plan of Chang'an, capital of the Han empire during the "Western Han" period (206 B.C.–A.D. 8).	449
15.8	Tarim mummy from Zaghunluq, Xinjiang, China.	451
15.9	Reconstructed <i>kofun</i> tomb of Hotoda-Hachiman-zuka in Takasaki City, Gunma prefecture, Japan; late fifth century A.D.	456
15.10	Aerial photograph of the Daisen keyhole <i>kofun</i> tomb with its triple moat, close to modern Osaka. This massive monument built during the fifth century A.D. was the burial place of one of the early rulers of Japan. The reconstructed Hotoda-Hachiman-zuka <i>kofun</i> (Figure 15.9) gives an indication of its original appearance.	457
16.0	Elaborate murals decorate rooms in a palace building at the Classic Maya city of Bonampak, Mexico. Here, splendidly adorned dancers whirl across the steps of building, while to the upper left royal women stoically draw blood from their tongues with stingray spines as a ritual offering.	461
16.1	Map of archaeological sites and states mentioned in Chapter 16.	466
16.2	Basalt Colossal Head (La Venta Monument 1) from La Venta measures 2.41 meters × 2.08 meters × 1.95 meters (7.9 feet × 6.8 feet × 6.4 feet) deep, and weighs 25 tons. It is now located in the Parque La Venta in Villahermosa, Tabasco. Such portraits of Olmec rulers are identified as individuals by their distinct faces and medallions on their helmet-like headdresses that may represent their names.	474
16.3	A basalt Olmec throne (called "Altar 4"; 1.6 meters/5.25 feet tall) from La Venta depicts a lord emerging from the flowered mouth of a cave, a place of origin and vitality. He holds a rope that binds prisoners carved on either side of the throne. Now located in the Parque La Venta in Villahermosa, Tabasco.	474
16.4	An aspect of one of the Maya hero twins makes an auto-sacrifice of blood from his penis in a Preclassic mural at San Bartolo, Guatemala.	478
16.5	The difficulties of Maya archaeology. (a) El Mirador is mantled in thick forest cover. (b) An El Mirador temple complex exposed during excavations.	479
16.6	The Maya calendar represented for modern viewers as a set of cogs in which the 365-day solar calendar (left) meshes with the 260-day lunar calendar (right).	483
16.7	The ball court at Copán.	486
16.8	LIDAR survey of central Tikal (left) reveals the scale of the ancient city's core, still largely hidden beneath dense tropical canopy (right). Both images represent exactly the	

	same piece of the landscape. Left: Lidar image courtesy of PACUNAM and the MARI GISlab. Right: Google Earth Image copyright 2020 CNES/Airbus.	488
16.9	The pyramid known as Temple I, with the North Acropolis rising to the left, in the Great Plaza of Tikal.	489
16.10	Central precincts of Palenque, with the Temple of the Inscriptions at left and the royal palace at right.	493
16.11	Built into the base of the Temple of the Inscriptions was the tomb of K'inich Hanaab Pakal, powerful ruler of Palenque, where he was buried in a finely wrought sarcophagus. On the lid the deceased ruler is shown rising reborn from the bony jaws of the underworld.	494
16.12	Tatiana Proskouriakoff's reconstruction of the central area of Copán. Courtesy Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.	499
16.13	Reconstruction of the Hieroglyphic Stairway at Copán by Tatiana Proskouriakoff.	505
16.14	(a) The Castillo at Chichen Itzá. (b) The Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza, a stepped pyramid fronted and flanked by carved columns depicting warriors.	507
17.0	Elderly Aztecs smoking, and enjoying pulque, a fermented beer-like beverage made from agave. From the Codex Mendoza, created in 1553 after the Spanish conquest.	509
17.1	Map showing archaeological sites and civilizations.	511
17.2	The central precincts of Monte Albán, towering on a hilltop above the Valley of Oaxaca, Mexico. Building J is the pentagonal structure at center, while Building L with its Danzante figures is at center left.	515
17.3	The main facade of a buried version of Building L, with the lowest row of orthostats in situ depicting personages in a procession, some of them with their glyphic names, c. 400 B.C.	517
17.4	Teotihuacán showing the Pyramid of the Sun (back left) and the Avenue of the Dead, looking southward from atop the stairs of the Pyramid of the Moon.	521
17.5	Temple of the Feathered Serpent, Teotihuacán. The body of the Feathered Serpent (known as Quetzalcoatl to the Aztecs) undulates along the building, while his head juts forth with its toothy mouth. Sitting along the serpent's body are representations of the reptilian shell platelet headdresses associated with Teotihuacan warriors.	523
17.6	Murals at the Tepantitla compound show (<i>above</i>) the rain god looking down on a paradisaical landscape, while (<i>below</i>) in another room, figures march in a procession scattering symbols of fertility and life.	527
17.7	Colossal warriors, atlatls (dart-throwers) held at their sides, atop Pyramid B at Tula.	531

17.8	An artist's impression of the central precincts of Tenochtitlán and the Valley of Mexico.	534
17.9	The excavated Templo Mayor in the heart of Mexico City, showing multiple construction layers of the staircases that once fronted the great pyramid.	537
17.10	A priest offers a human heart to the patron deity of the Mexica, Huitzilopochtli.	539
17.11	An inventory of taxes paid by cities (named in column at left) in the Aztec Empire. The levied items noted here include finely woven clothes, warrior uniforms and shields, tropical bird feathers, beads, and turquoise mosaics. From the Codex Mendoza, Bodleian Library, Oxford.	543
17.12	Aztec warriors in their finery. From the Codex Mendoza, Bodleian Library, Oxford.	544
18.0	Central portion of a Nasca cotton and camelid wool cloth (radiocarbon dated to 170 B.C.–A.D. 70) showing costumed figures in a ritual procession with severed heads, perhaps part of a ceremony related to water rites (69.8 × 280.7 centimeters; 27 1/2 × 110 1/2 inches). The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Norweb Collection, 1940.530.	548
18.1	Map of the Andean region and archaeological sites.	551
18.2	A terraced platform, fronted by a sunken patio, at Caral in the Supe Valley. Sites of the Norte-Chico culture exhibit truly monumental constructions contemporary with the pyramids of Giza, yet their builders did not use ceramics and there is little evidence of political hierarchy.	558
18.3	(a) The reconstructed enclosure wall with monoliths at Cerro Sechín. (b) Cerro Sechín monoliths. A grimacing warrior armed with a club and wearing a plumed headdress is flanked by a severed human head and an additional pile of ten such heads, perhaps victims of a sacrificial ritual.	562
18.4	El Paraíso, with a view from the desert to the northeast over the ruins toward the narrow river valley, and the modern town beyond.	565
18.5	Chavín de Huantar, Peru. (a) Plan of the ceremonial center with major architectural features. Reciprocity Images/ Alamy Stock Photo. (b) A somewhat stylized drawing of the Lanzón monolith in the heart of the temple. About 4.5 meters (15 feet) high, the Lanzón depicts an anthropomorphic being, with eyes gazing upward and a snarling feline mouth with great fangs. The right hand, with claw-like nails, is raised; the left is by its side. Snarling felines stare in profile from the elaborate headdress and a girdle of felines surrounds the waist.	569
18.6	A shaman figure and other anthropomorphic beings on a Paracas woolen cloth, c. 500 B.C.	576

19.0	A stirrup spout portrait vessel depicting an elite member of Moche society.	578
19.1	Map of archaeological sites and states.	580
19.2	The Huaca del Sol (Temple of the Sun) at the ancient city of Huacas de Moche.	583
19.3	Reconstruction of Tomb 1 at Sipán, showing the lord in his regalia set in his coffin, also male and female attendants.	587
19.4	A Moche lord presides over a parade of prisoners who are being sacrificed: frieze from a painted pot “unrolled” photographically.	589
19.5	A golden ear ornament worn by a lord of Sipán, inlaid with turquoise. The warrior at center wears a ceremonial headdress and an owl’s head necklace. He is accompanied by two attendants.	589
19.6	The huaca at Dos Cabezas in the Jequetepeque Valley, where royal burials were excavated.	591
19.7	Blowing fine dust off the funerary bundle of a noble buried with a llama head and fine ceramics at Dos Cabezas.	592
19.8	Nasca lines (geoglyphs), scratched out in the desert plain in the form of lines, some representing birds and other symbols.	596
19.9	The Ponce Monolith viewed through a doorway in the Kalasasaya precinct at Tiwanaku.	600
19.10	A gold, silver, and copper alloy funerary mask, adorned with red cinnabar paint and silver overlays, from the Sicán (Lambayeque) culture. This mask would have covered the mummy bundle of a deceased male ruler. The almond eyes mark the individual as a deified being whose piercing vision is emphasized by the protruding needles. The hanging pendants likely gave a sense of vitality as the mummy was carried in a procession to his tomb. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift and Bequest of Alice K. Bache, 1974, 1977.	603
19.11	The Nik An Palace at Chan Chan, with its great enclosures reserved for Chimú rulers and the maintenance of their mummies after biological death.	605
19.12	Intensive land use by the Inka is evident in the agricultural terraces that scale the hillsides near the rural Inka palace of Pisac, near Cusco, with the Sacred Valley of the Urubamba River below.	608
19.13	An Inka khipukamayuc official (labeled in Spanish as an “accountant” or “treasurer”) with his <i>khipu</i> , illustrated in the work of the Quechua author Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (c. 1525–after 1616).	612
19.14	Inka architecture at the fortress of Sacsayhuaman, near Cusco.	614

xxxii Figures

- 19.15 Ignored by outsiders for 400 years after the Spanish conquest, Machu Picchu, a royal Inka retreat high in the Andes, was brought to the wider public's attention by American explorer Hiram Bingham in 1911. The peak of Huayna Picchu rises in the background. 614
- 19.16 The foundations of the Qorikancha are visible below the colonial Convent of Santo Domingo in Cusco, where the historical center of the city is incorporated and builds upon the Inka architecture. 616
- 20.0 Borobodur in Indonesia, the world's largest Buddhist temple, constructed in the ninth century A.D. and consisting of nine terraced platforms around a central dome. 617

TABLES

1.1	Chronological table of the world's earliest civilizations	5
3.1	Chronological table of early Mesopotamian civilizations	71
4.1	Chronological table of Egyptian and Nubian civilizations	112
4.2	Subdivisions of Egyptian history with major cultural and historical developments	115
5.1	Chronological table of South and Southeast Asian civilizations	160
6.1	Chronological table of Chinese civilizations	182
7.1	Chronological table of later Southwest Asian kingdoms 2500–500 B.C.	216
9.1	Chronological table of Aegean civilizations	267
11.1	Chronological table of Ancient Rome	332
16.1	Chronological table of Mesoamerican civilizations	465
18.1	Chronological table of Andean civilizations	550



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PREFACE

Three thousand, four thousand years maybe, have passed and gone since human feet last trod the floor on which you stand, and yet, as you note the recent signs of life around you—the half-filled bowl of mortar for the door, the darkened lamp, the finger mark on the freshly painted surface, the farewell garland dropped on the threshold. . . . Time is annihilated by little intimate details such as these, and you feel an intruder.

—Egyptologist Howard Carter, notebook entry on
Tutankhamun's tomb, November 26, 1922.

Ancient civilizations tempt romantic visions of the past: golden pharaohs, great cities and temple mounds, lost palaces mantled in swirling mists. The discovery of the Assyrians, Homeric Troy, and the abandoned Maya cities of Central America was one of the nineteenth-century's great adventure stories. Nineteenth-century archaeologists like Englishman Austen Henry Layard, who excavated biblical Nineveh, and New Yorker John Lloyd Stephens, who revealed the ancient Maya to an astonished world, became celebrities and best-selling authors. They and other early excavators are the prototypes of the swashbuckling Indiana Jones of late twentieth-century movie fame. The romance continued into the 1920s, culminating in Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon's dramatic discovery of the undisturbed tomb of the pharaoh Tutankhamun and Sir Leonard Woolley's spectacular excavation of the Royal Tombs at Ur in Iraq. Even today, the occasional spectacular find, like the terracotta regiment of the first Chinese emperor Qin Shihuangdi or the Lords of Sipán in coastal Peru, reminds us that archaeology can be a profoundly exciting endeavor.

The nineteenth century was the century of archaeological adventure. The twentieth century saw archaeology turn from a casual pursuit into a complex, highly specialized academic discipline. *Ancient Civilizations* describes what we know about the world's early civilizations today, 175 years after John Lloyd Stephens and artist Frederick Catherwood stumbled through the ruins of Maya Copán and Paul-Emile Botta and Austen Henry Layard electrified London and Paris with spectacular bas-reliefs from Assyrian palaces. This book is about science and multidisciplinary research, not about adventure and romance, an attempt to summarize state-of-the-art knowledge about preindustrial civilizations in every corner of the world. We draw on many avenues of inquiry: on archaeological excavations, surveys, and laboratory work; on highly specialized scientific investigations into such topics as the sources of volcanic glass and metals; and on both historical and ethnohistorical records. In the final analysis, this book is a synthesis of science and ancient voices, for in many cases the latter add telling detail to a story reconstructed from purely material remains.

Ancient Civilizations is divided into six parts that lead logically from one to the other. Part I gives essential background, some key definitions, and historical information. It also describes some of the major theories concerning the development of civilizations, one of the key controversies of archaeology for more than a century. Part II focuses on the very first civilizations: Mesopotamia,

Egypt, the Indus Valley, and the earliest Chinese states. Parts III and IV build on earlier foundations and trace later civilizations in Southwest Asia and the Mediterranean. This book is unique in that it goes on to describe classical Greek and Roman civilizations, whose roots lie much deeper in the past than many authorities would have one believe. Part V links the Mediterranean and Asian worlds with the discovery of the monsoon winds of the Indian Ocean about 2,000 years ago. Finally, the last four chapters, Part VI, describe the remarkable states of Mesoamerica and the Andean region of the Americas. An epilogue rounds off the narrative.

This book provides the reader with a straightforward narrative account of the ancient civilizations from their first appearance in Southwest Asia some 5,000 years ago to the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru in the early sixteenth century A.D. As such, it is written from a global perspective and without forcing it into a particular theoretical framework—this results both from the variability in the ancient societies themselves and from the diversity of the ways that they have been researched in recent decades. Chapter 2 summarizes major theoretical viewpoints and makes the point that the development of state-organized societies was a complex, multifaceted process, which took hold in many parts of the world. It also stresses that there were no overall principles or rules that governed this process. Rather, each civilization is a reflection of local conditions and of the distinctive worldview that shaped its institutions. Divine kingship is characteristic of Egyptian civilization, the Khmer, the Maya, and the Inka. But that does not mean that divine monarchy originated in one place and spread to all parts of the world thereafter. If there is a theoretical bias to this book, it is that each early civilization was a unique society, an attempt by human beings (as individuals and groups) who subsisted in very different environments to deal with problems of growing populations, increasingly crowded living conditions, and ever-greater economic, political, and social complexity. We know that each instructor will use this book in a different way, each bringing his or her theoretical emphases to the narrative in these pages, so this approach seems appropriate.

We provide a Guide to Further Reading at the end of the book rather than a comprehensive bibliography because the individual literatures for each area are so extensive and complex. The works cited in the chapter-by-chapter Guide to Further Reading will give readers access to the more specialized literature through widely quoted standard works and some guidance through a myriad of specialized monographs and periodical articles.

Inevitably, a book of this nature is a compromise, both in geographical coverage and in topics selected for more detailed discussion. We are also limited in our ability to illustrate the complex archaeological record of these societies. For example, our coverage of many aspects of Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilization is inevitably sketchy, especially in the areas of religion, philosophical beliefs, and literature. The Guide to Further Reading refers the reader to works that cover these subjects in detail. Our primary concerns are to achieve balanced geographical coverage and to place the world's ancient civilizations in as broad an archaeological and historical context as possible. We believe that one can understand these societies only by seeking their roots deep in the past, by reconstructing their local environments, and by placing them in both an indigenous and a broader perspective. We hope that we have succeeded in this.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FIFTH EDITION

The fifth edition of *Ancient Civilizations* has been revised throughout to reflect the latest advances in the field, and it includes suggestions from both instructors and students who have taken the trouble to contact us after reading previous editions. There is fresh coverage throughout the book, specifically of new discoveries and the latest theoretical advances. For this edition we are especially pleased to welcome Charles Golden, expert on the early civilizations of the Americas, as the third member of our team.

Updating and Rewriting

- East Asia: Chapter 6 has been substantially revised to include the wealth of new research that is becoming available on the development of early civilization in China.
- Africa: A new chapter has been added (Chapter 13) to cover the early states and civilizations of sub-Saharan Africa, including Great Zimbabwe, Ife, and Benin.
- Mesoamerica and the Andes: Chapters 16 through 19 have been extensively revised and expanded to accommodate the results of the latest fieldwork and research.
- Revision and updating throughout: The entire text and the Guide to Further Reading have been revised and updated on a page-by-page basis.

Feature Boxes

Three types of in-text feature boxes—designed to amplify the narrative—enhance the book:

- Discoveries: These feature boxes describe important finds that changed our perceptions of early civilizations.
- Sites: These feature boxes discuss sites of unusual interest and significance.
- Voices: These feature boxes refer to writings of ancient times, giving a unique “voice” to the text.

New and Revised Art Program

The fifth edition’s art program has been expanded with new photographs and new or revised line art. These illustrations provide additional background on recent discoveries, amplify the narrative, or replace older images with new images. Some expanded captions serve to integrate the illustrations more closely into the text.

Complete Redesign

The entire book has been completely redesigned to make it more user-friendly.



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book results from years of experience, from fieldwork, from academic conferences, from visiting many of the sites we describe, and from hours of discussion with fellow archaeologists. It is impossible to name all of these colleagues but we hope that they will take this collective acknowledgment as an inadequate reflection of our sincere gratitude for their advice and intellectual insights.

A number of scholars reviewed the manuscript while it was in preparation. For the fifth edition we are grateful to the Rob Witcher, Catherine Draycott, and Ann Brysbaert for reviewing the Mediterranean chapters, and to Ken'ichi Sasaki for advice on Japan. We are also deeply grateful to the Routledge production team, and to Rebecca Dunn and her colleagues at codeMantra, who made the process of turning a complex manuscript into a published book such a pleasure.

Chris Scarre
Brian M. Fagan
Charles Golden



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PART I

Background

Between them Sennacherib and his hosts had gone forth in all their might and glory to the conquest of distant lands, and had returned rich with spoil and captives, amongst whom may have been the handmaidens and wealth of Israel. . . . Through them, too, the Assyrian monarch had entered his capital in shame, after his last and fatal defeat.

—Austen Henry Layard (1853, 212) on the human-headed bulls that guarded Assyrian King Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh.



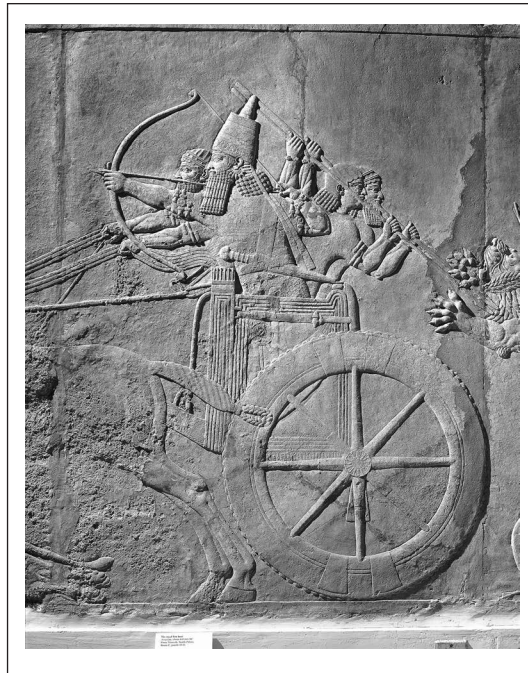
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The Study of Civilization

FIGURE 1.0 Assyrian King Assurbanipal (668–627 B.C.) hunting lions, a scene depicted in this relief carved panel from his palace at Nineveh in Iraq. DEA/G. Dagli Orti/De Agostini/Getty Images.



The chariot rattles over the plains as the driver clutches the reins, steadying the horses so the king can take better aim. Bowstring pulled taut, Assurbanipal, supreme ruler of the mighty Assyrian empire, stands ready to fire a volley of arrows against the fleeing lions. Already he has had good sport in the royal park, killing or wounding several of them in a show of kingly skill. Suddenly king and driver hear a roar behind them. An injured lion breaks cover and charges the chariot, seeking to kill its tormentors, but the royal attendants are too quick. Stationed on the back of the chariot for just such an emergency, they thrust their long-handled spears into the lion's chest. The great beast falls dead in the dust. . .

CHAPTER OUTLINE

What Is a “Civilization”?	6
Comparing Civilizations	8
Civilizations and Their Neighbors	9
“Primary” and “Secondary” Civilizations	11
The Rediscovery of Ancient Civilizations	12
<i>Classical Civilizations: Greece and Rome</i>	13
<i>Egypt</i>	14
<i>Mesopotamian Civilizations: Assyrians and Sumerians</i>	16
<i>Greece and Crete: Minoans and Mycenaeans</i>	18
<i>The Indus and East Asia</i>	19
<i>The Americas: Mesoamerica</i>	20
<i>The Americas: Peru</i>	22
The Threat to Ancient Civilizations	23

The modern visitor can see the scene of King Assurbanipal’s lion hunt, carved in stone, in the Assyrian gallery of the British Museum. It is one of the many monuments of “civilization” that fill great museums in Europe and North America, be it the Louvre in Paris or the Metropolitan in New York. Wander into adjacent galleries and you will find mummiform coffins from ancient Egypt and intricate bronze ritual vessels from early China. Just around the corner will be red-figured vases from classical Athens or marble busts of Roman emperors. Many enthusiastic and intrepid tourists venture further afield and visit the places from which these priceless relics originated. They wonder at the sheer size of the pyramids in Egypt or at the desolation that now surrounds many of the ancient cities of Mesopotamia. Sailing the Aegean, they trace the routes taken by ancient Greek mariners 2,500 years ago. In the south of Mexico, Maya ballcourts inspire visitors to ponder how the rules of game worked, and which players may have been sacrificed at the end of play. They hike the Inka trail of Peru, emerging through ancient gates to take in the spectacular views offered by Machu Picchu.

All these are remains of what today we call “ancient civilizations” (see Figure 1.1; Table 1.1), and their study has attracted scholars and laypeople for centuries. *Ancient Civilizations* describes these extraordinary early societies, using archaeological evidence and historical records, oral traditions, and scientific evidence from many academic disciplines. Thus, our story comes not only from modern science but from the voices of those who created the early civilizations as well.

The societies we will describe span 5,000 years and cover most regions of the world: from the first cities of the ancient Mesopotamia, around 3500 B.C.; through Egypt and China, classical Greece and Rome; to the New World civilizations of the Maya and Olmec; ending with the Aztec and Inka empires, which were flourishing at the time of the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century A.D.

FIGURE 1.1 The distribution of early preindustrial civilizations.

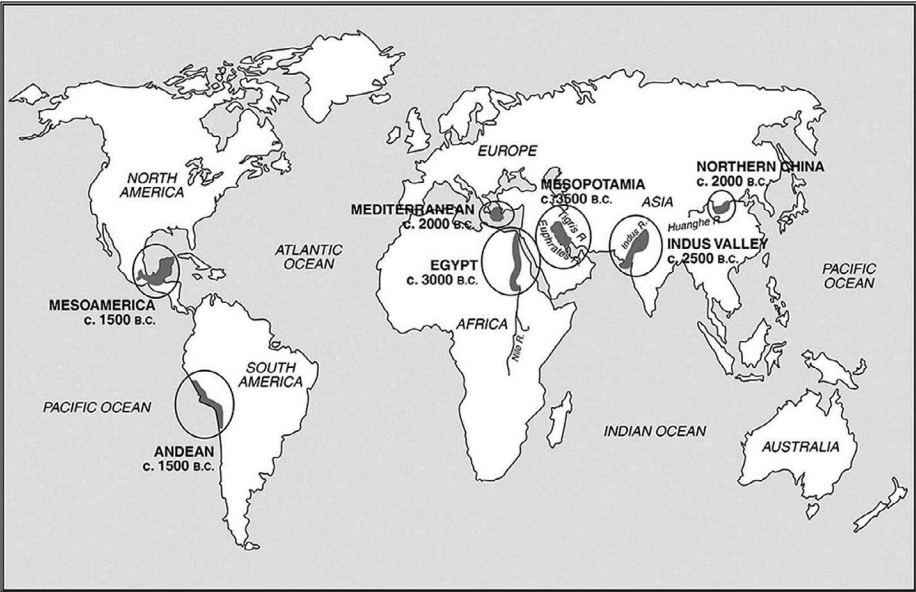
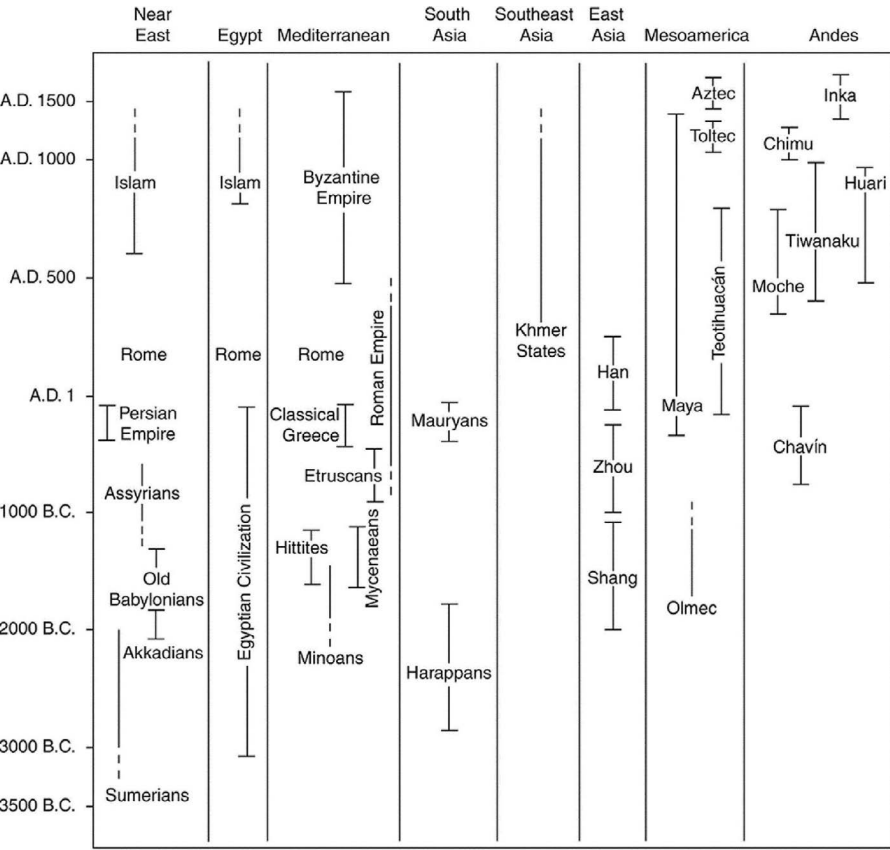


TABLE 1.1 Chronological table of the world's earliest civilizations.



WHAT IS A “CIVILIZATION”?

The proper definition of civilization has occupied the minds of archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians for generations. An enormous scholarly literature surrounds this complex subject, but for the purposes of this volume we must content ourselves with a simple, if possible all-embracing, working definition that covers a great multitude of complex, early civilizations.

According to that ultimate arbiter of the English language, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “to civilize” is “to bring out of a state of barbarism, to instruct in the arts of life; to enlighten and refine.” The notion that “civilization” is a condition superior to “barbarism” underlay nineteenth-century doctrines of racial superiority of more than a century ago and lives on today in the popular understanding of the word. It is perhaps only natural to admire the grandiose monuments, the powerful artworks, and the evocative literature left by the ancient Romans or Egyptians. These give us a vivid picture of complex societies, in some senses comparable to our own. But they are not “better” than earlier or contemporary societies that were less complex. Such a value-laden contrast has no place in archaeology. Archaeologists do not regard civilizations as better than hunter-gatherer societies or those of small-scale farmers. Instead, they are all understood to be only different facets of the rich panoply of human social organization.

Politically minded commentators might well draw a very different conclusion: that the ancient civilizations, with their privileged elites, centralized governments, and crowded, insanitary cities were worse places to live for the ordinary peasants or the urban populace. There is certainly ample evidence of the cruelty that so-called civilized societies could inflict on their enemies and their own subjects, through warfare, slavery, coercion, and punishment. Even in classical Athens, home of the philosophers Socrates and Plato, and the very hearth of democracy, there were probably as many slaves condemned to working the lead and silver mines as there were male Athenian citizens who were qualified to vote. Many of the famed Greek artworks we so much admire today were produced for an elite and seen by only a privileged few. Yet the cultural and scientific achievements of the early civilizations are undeniable, and while we may temper our admiration, we must not underestimate their significance to world history.

A hundred years ago, the climate of scholarly opinion was very different. Nineteenth-century archaeologists and anthropologists were heavily influenced by theories of biological and social evolution developed by the biologist Charles Darwin and the social scientist Herbert Spencer. In his *Origin of Species*, published in 1859, Darwin had shown that in the natural world, it was only the fittest plants and animals that survived and that “natural selection” was the guiding force in making others extinct. Early social scientists such as Spencer attempted to apply the same reasoning to human societies. They saw colonial powers conquering and transforming (for the better, in their minds) societies throughout the world, and they considered this to be proof that European civilizations were in an evolutionary sense “superior.” This thinking and the achievements of nineteenth-century archaeologists were summarized in a guidebook to the archaeology exhibits at the Paris Exposition of 1867, which proposed that there existed “laws” of human progress and similar human development.

English anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor was one of the fathers of nineteenth-century anthropology and a fervent believer in human progress. He surveyed human development in all of its forms, from the Paleolithic flint axes found in France, to Maya temples in Central America, and finally to Victorian civilization. Tylor reemphasized a three-level sequence of human development popular with eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scholars: from simple hunting “savagery” through a stage of simple farming to “barbarism,” and then to “civilization,” the most complex of human conditions. Tylor’s contemporary, American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan went even further. In his *Ancient Society* (1877) he proposed no fewer than seven distinct periods of human progress, starting with simple savagery and culminating in a “state of civilization.”

Such doctrines of unilinear (single-line) cultural evolution remained popular well into the twentieth century. In the 1930s and 1940s, Australian-born archaeologist Gordon Childe refined this general approach. In *What Happened in History* (1942), he equated “savagery” with the hunter-gatherers of the Paleolithic and Mesolithic, “barbarism” with the farmers of the Neolithic and Copper Age, and “civilization” with the Bronze Age communities of Mesopotamia and the Levant. As “barbarism” was superior to “savagery,” so was “civilization” to “barbarism.” Childe believed that progression from one condition to the next needed little explanation, only the opportunity to be presented for societies to make the change. These emotive terms are no longer acceptable in modern archaeological thinking.

Today, archaeologists use the term *civilization* as a shorthand for urbanized, state-level societies. These are sometimes called “preindustrial civilizations” because they relied on manual labor rather than fossil fuels such as coal. Not everybody accepts the definition in such simple terms. Some scholars have even drawn up long lists of features that they feel societies must possess to qualify as civilizations. Such lists often include writing and metallurgy. The limitations of this approach are obvious. For example, the Inka societies of the Andes did not use writing *per se*, yet they had centralized government, substantial cities, an ordered and hierarchical society, specialized craft skills, metallurgy, and an elaborate network of roads and rest houses, as well as a record-keeping system involving knotted strings. Few would deny them the status of a civilization.

How, then, do archaeologists recognize and define a civilization? This is a difficult area of discussion. We have already referred to two of the primary characteristics: urbanization (the presence of cities) and the state (a centralized political unit). These features, in turn, need to be defined:

- A city is a large and relatively dense settlement, with a population numbered in at least the thousands. Small cities of the ancient world had 2,000 or 3,000 inhabitants; the largest, such as Rome or Changan (China), may have had over a million.
- Cities are also characterized by specialization and by interdependence between the city and its rural hinterland and between specialist craftspeople and other groups within the city. The city is what is termed a “central place” in its region, providing services for the villages of the surrounding area while at the same time depending on those villages for food. Most cities, for example, would have had a marketplace where agricultural produce could be exchanged.

- Cities also have a degree of organizational complexity well beyond that of small farming communities. There are centralized institutions to regulate internal affairs and ensure security. These usually find expression in monumental architecture such as temples or palaces or sometimes a city wall. Here we must recognize an overlap between the concept of the city and the concept of the state. States, too, are characterized by centralized institutions. It may be possible to have states without cities; but it is hard to envisage a city that is not embedded within a state.

An ancient city site will usually be obvious to archaeologists, both from its size and from the scale of its remains. The state is more difficult to define. It is essentially a political unit, governed by a central authority whose power cross-cuts bonds of kinship. Kin groups do not disappear, of course, but their power is reduced, and a new axis of control emerges that is based on allegiance to a ruling elite, including officials who may constitute a bureaucracy.

Cities and states are not the only factors that have been cited in historical attempts to define civilization. One of the most famous attempts was made by Gordon Childe, whom we have already mentioned. In 1950, he drew up a list of ten traits that he considered to be the common characteristics of early civilizations throughout the world. In the 1970s, archaeologist Charles Redman divided Childe's list into "primary" and "secondary." The primary characteristics include cities and states, together with full-time specialization of labor, concentration of surplus, and a class-structured society. The five secondary characteristics are symptoms or by-products of these major economic and organizational changes: monumental public works, long-distance trade, standardized monumental artworks, writing, and the sciences (arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy). Nonetheless, we have already noted the shortcomings of such lists of shared traits, and not all civilizations possess all of Childe's ten traits. While they may be useful to think with, such lists can never be considered an adequate "definition" of a civilization.

This is a book about preindustrial civilizations drawn on a very wide canvas. Many surveys of early civilization confine themselves to the first states and to the controversies surrounding the origins of civilization, one of the great issues in archaeology. We have chosen instead to describe early civilizations on a global basis and their development over long periods of time. For instance, in Southwest Asia, we cover not only the first city-states but also the empires of Assyria and Babylon. In the Mediterranean region, where many surveys of early civilization stop with the fall of Late Bronze Age Mycenae in about 1200 B.C., we have included chapters on the Greeks, Carthaginians, Etruscans, and Romans. In East Asia, coverage of the earliest Chinese civilization, that of the Shang, is followed through in a later chapter on the Han empire, where the emergence of states in Korea and Japan is also outlined. In Africa, we deal not only with Egypt, Meroe, and Aksum but also with the later kingdoms of Benin and Great Zimbabwe. Similarly, in the Americas, we cover the entire 3,500-year trajectory of state-organized societies in Central and South America.

COMPARING CIVILIZATIONS

The world's early civilizations developed along many different lines while at the same time sharing some fundamental core features, such as complex political hierarchies, that define them as civilizations. Although the specifics of

urban spaces differ, cities are characteristic of both Sumerian and Aztec civilizations on different sides of the world. While details of construction and function vary wildly, the Egyptians buried their monarchs under pyramids, as did the Maya. Social inequality is common to all early civilizations, as is a strongly centralized government headed by a minority who controlled all valuable resources and the loyalty and labor of thousands of commoners. Force, or the threat of force, was all-important as a means of coercing rivals and rebellious citizens. The Egyptians, the Khmer of Cambodia, and the Inka of Peru all had forms of divine kingship, but vary in many other respects. Comparison is helpful at a different level, however, one that does not seek to establish grand theories but merely to describe or review similarities and differences. This was the approach taken by Canadian archaeologist Bruce Trigger, who compared seven early civilizations in such features as population density, technology, religious beliefs and practices, legal systems, and family and community organization.

Trigger emphasized an important distinction between civilizations based on city-states (such as those of Mesopotamia, the Maya, or Greece) and those (such as Egypt, the Inka, and Shang China) that were unitary or territorial states. He postulated that in city-states the city's populace made up the whole spectrum of society, with craftspeople, farmers, and the elite. The cities themselves were hubs of commercial activity, with flourishing markets. By contrast, in territorial states the earliest cities were principally political centers. Farmers lived in the rural hinterland in small settlements secure without walls (since territorial states were less afflicted by internecine strife). Trigger argued that in territorial states the interaction between rural farmers and urban centers was largely in the form of taxes paid by the farmers to the city-based bureaucracies. The farmers were less reliant on urban craftspeople and markets than they were in city-state societies.

The nature of the early cities themselves was very variable. Some were dense concentrations of population, bounded by a city wall for defense. Others were ceremonial and administrative centers, surrounded by more diffuse populations that supported the needs of the elites and those resident in the urban core. This "low density urbanism" was a feature of civilizations in tropical latitudes such as the Maya, or the Khmer whose vast complex at Angkor spread over many square kilometers. Even in walled cities, however, we should not imagine that the whole of the space was taken up by buildings: An early description of the Mesopotamian city of Uruk states that one-third of the walled area was occupied by gardens.

Contrasts and parallels such as those proposed by Trigger are thought-provoking and provide valuable new insights. They do not explain everything. They do, however, invite us to address general questions and to consider why human societies in very different contexts in widely separated parts of the world chose to adopt such strikingly similar solutions, a point we return to shortly.

CIVILIZATIONS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

One fundamental feature shared by every civilization is a relatively dense concentration of people. This is the basis of both city-dwelling and state formation. Small bands of hunter-gatherers or subsistence farmers do not build

cities, nor do they create territorial states. It is large concentrations of people that make these achievements possible or perhaps even make them necessary. Small-scale societies manage to survive quite successfully without the burdensome economic and political organization necessary to support and regulate city life. There is no set threshold for populations. Population density is quantitative, measurable in people per square kilometer or square mile. But the impact of such population density, and the transformation of societies that can result in the emergence of political complexity, is relative, and represents a complicated mix of cultural practices, local ecologies and climate, and technologies, among other variables. Once several hundred people are living in a single settlement—whether we would call it a large village or a small city—it becomes essential to have some centralized authority to give direction to the community and resolve disputes. Gradually, as a result of this process, these large populations become qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from other societies around them. It is not just that there are more people crowded into a small space (be it a single city or a limited area of fertile farmland). Rather, they begin to organize themselves differently, to have distinct ideologies and social institutions. It is these innovations that identify them as civilizations.

It was organizing this rich human resource of dense populations that made possible the pyramids of Egypt and the Shang tombs at Anyang. But large populations also had a major impact on surrounding areas. Early civilizations were not hermetically sealed units. They generated a new level of need for raw materials, and those that were not found within their own territories had to be imported from abroad. Consider Mesopotamia as a typical example. The famous early cities of Ur, Uruk, and Babylon were in the south of the country, a fertile plain fed with water by the twin rivers Tigris and Euphrates. This was a land rich in crops and clay but hardly the place to find hard stone for tools, still less the copper, tin, and gold that were increasingly in demand by urban elites. To obtain these raw materials, Mesopotamian traders had to travel far afield, to the Zagros Mountains, the Taurus range of southern Turkey, across the Iranian plateau, or by ship to Oman or India. Here they came into contact with communities at a very different level of social organization. They traded Mesopotamian products in exchange for raw materials, winning the favor of local leaders by gifts of textiles and other products of foreign craftsmanship.

Such contacts were not always peaceful. The enormous human resources and centralized organization of early civilizations made it possible for them to dispense with the protocols of commerce and simply to raid, invade, or annex neighboring areas and appropriate their valuables. Mesopotamian records contain frequent references to military campaigns against troublesome mountain tribes. The converse was also true. Mountain tribes and desert nomads found rich pickings on settled lands. One object of state-organized military campaigns therefore was to dissuade people on the fringes from attacking the cities of the plain. More important, though, was the appropriation of timber, metal, and valuables or the extortion of other tribute. This dispensed with the requirement for the “civilized” to give anything—other than the threat of violence—in exchange for what they took.

Thus, being a close neighbor to an early state was often an uncomfortable experience. By means such as these the impact of early civilizations spread far

beyond the confines of the states themselves. The peoples with whom they came into contact could hardly have remained unaffected by their presence. We may imagine that local peoples were both impressed and mystified by the traders, with their exotic trade goods and stories of faraway places—still more so when a sizable army arrived on their doorstep, equipped with bronze weapons and armor, and led by a king dressed in priceless regalia, the likes of which they had never seen before. The prestige of civilizations among neighboring peoples should not be underestimated. It held true not only in early Mesopotamia, Shang China, or in the case of the Maya and Teotihuacán in Mesoamerica¹ but also in relations between Greeks and Romans and the “barbarian” peoples beyond their frontiers.

“PRIMARY” AND “SECONDARY” CIVILIZATIONS

We have discussed relations between civilizations and less-complex societies. What about contacts between the civilizations themselves? That such contacts existed is shown both by finds of traded items and by documentary evidence. Distinctive Mesopotamian cylinder seals, for example, turn up in the Indus Valley and tie in with the boast of King Sargon of Akkad (a Mesopotamian ruler) that Indus ships docked at his capital.

The vexing question is whether contacts from one civilization actually instigated or propelled the rise of another. This is where the terms *primary* (or *pristine*) and *secondary* come in. Primary is usually reserved for those civilizations that are thought to have come into being independently. They are sometimes called simply the “first civilizations.” The list includes Mesopotamia and Egypt, the Indus Valley, Shang China, the Olmec of Mesoamerica, and the early civilizations of Peru. In none of these cases is stimulus from another center of civilization thought to have played a decisive role. The secondary civilizations are those of later date: notably the Minoans and Mycenaeans in the Aegean, the Aztec of Mexico, or the early civilizations of Nubia and Southeast Asia. In those cases it is held that influences from long-established civilizations had a crucial formative impact.

Many archaeologists (including us) would now question the usefulness of this division. Evidence of contact between civilizations is neither surprising nor rare. As we have seen, the need for raw materials and the prestige and power of these societies of unprecedented scale sent ripples far afield. They provided new sets of ideas about how to organize life and held out for all to see the wealth that might be available to elites in this new and complex type of society. But availability does not lead immediately or inevitably to adoption. One of the most striking features of the early civilizations we describe in these pages is their individuality and distinctiveness. So, contact between civilizations, yes, but no simple connection between the rise of one and the birth of another.

The once popular idea, still sometimes proposed, that the early civilizations of the world share some common point of origin may easily be disproved by considering the global pattern. Contacts between Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus Valley, and the Aegean are clearly documented and come as no surprise. It does not lead us to regard any of them as simply an imitation of the others. Shang China, too, may have had some links with western Asia; at any rate the war chariots found in Shang graves at Anyang came

from western Asia and must have reached China via the steppes of central Asia. But no archaeologist today would suggest that Shang civilization owes its origin to Western contact.

The case for independent development of civilizations becomes fully incontrovertible when we turn to the Americas. American civilizations were, to a greater or lesser extent, in contact with one another: trade routes bound the Ancestral Pueblos and Mesoamerican civilizations, maize agriculture spread out from Mexico across two continents, and metallurgy moved north from coastal South America to Mesoamerica. Yet there is no evidence for significant contact between indigenous American and Eurasian civilizations until the arrival of the Norse in Newfoundland in the late tenth century A.D. and Spanish conquistadors in Mexico five centuries later. Nonetheless, both Old World and New World civilizations share such features as agriculture, writing, metallurgy, urbanism, and state-level organization. The appearance of these parallel innovations in separate parts of the world is striking. Humans under certain conditions develop their societies along similar paths, but within the context of their own religious and philosophical beliefs; their own social traditions and conventions; and their own economies, environments, and technologies.

There is no need, then, to lay undue stress on contacts and borrowings in describing the rise of civilizations. In this book, we treat each as a separate, independent development, though at the same time noting the evidence for contact and trade between them.

THE REDISCOVERY OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

A century ago, a journey by boat up the Nile River took you through the heart of rural Egypt. Nineteenth-century travelers like the British writer Amelia Edwards described a kaleidoscope of village life unfolding along the banks, which they saw as little changed from the days of the pharaohs. The ruined temples and burial places of Egypt's ancient god-kings lay among modern mud-brick villages. Egyptian *fellahin* (peasants) have always known of the existence of their illustrious forbearers, just as the modern-day Maya of the Yucatán lowlands have always remembered their roots among great kingdoms of the past. In some cases, Maya communities carefully preserved oral histories and documents handed down from generation to generation, which now provide invaluable information on the remote past. Thus, in many cases, it is misleading to write of the "discovery" of the early civilizations. However, the "rediscovery" of the world's first state-organized societies over the past two centuries ranks among the greatest achievements of Western science.

Archaeologists have brought a refined and disciplined methodology to the study of ancient civilizations, which has produced often astonishingly detailed information about preindustrial states. Today's knowledge of the early civilizations results from a powerful synthesis of archaeology and data from historical and traditional sources. Thus, on many occasions, we are able to combine the data of science with actual "voices" from the remote past preserved in contemporary documents or even in oral traditions.

The beginnings of a formal discipline of archaeology began at least five centuries ago, in the hands of adventurers, antiquarians, and some remarkable pioneering scholars of ancient civilizations. For clarity, we describe the rediscovery of early civilizations in the order in which they were found.

Classical Civilizations: Greece and Rome

Our story begins during the Renaissance, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This was when European scholars, first in Italy, and then in northern Europe, took a new interest in the writings of the classical authors of Greece and Rome. Italian architects compared Greek and Roman texts on art and architecture with the remains of surviving Roman buildings to gain a new appreciation of classical principles of construction and design. The discovery of Roman artworks such as the marble statue of the god Apollo known as the Apollo Belvedere in 1489 directly inspired Italian Renaissance artists such as Michelangelo. The interest in Greek and Roman art and literature was soon followed by an interest in the countries from which they came. Wealthy Europeans began to make their own collections of portable classical antiquities with a particular interest in Italy. In the early seventeenth century, King Charles I of England was one of the greatest of these collectors. So were the popes at Rome, whose collections of Etruscan, Greek, Roman, and Egyptian antiquities form a significant part of the holdings of the Vatican museums.

Italy was relatively accessible, and Italian rulers and noblemen were among the first excavators of Roman archaeological sites. These excavations fell well short of the standards acceptable today, and their primary aim was often the recovery of collectable objects. But some collectors did at least begin to record the provenance of artifacts such as vases in their original settings, be it a tomb or a residence, making scholars aware of the wealth of information that could be obtained from buried remains. The cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, entombed in ash since the great eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, provided some of the most spectacular results: Sculptures, bronzes, and precious metal objects were ripped from the ruins in the 1740s and 1750s on the orders of the king and queen of Naples. It was only in the 1860s that more sensitive methods were applied, and Pompeii began to yield evidence of splendid wall paintings and the gruesome plaster casts of those who died while fleeing from the ash-fall (Figure 1.2).

These early modern connoisseurs of ancient art and literature had less access to the Classical civilization of the eastern Mediterranean, since Greece remained under the control of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. Several Western European scholars and collectors nonetheless made visits to Greece, where they found many ancient buildings and monuments in a state of neglect and decay. A major turning point was the expedition of British architects James Stuart and Nicholas Revett in 1751–1753. They spent several months in Athens, drawing with meticulous accuracy the ruins of the great classical buildings they found there, and published the results in a handsome three-volume illustrated set on their return. Fifty years later the British diplomat Lord Elgin controversially shipped the famous frieze of the Parthenon from Athens to Britain. The “Elgin Marbles” went on display in the British Museum and remain in London to this day. The removal of Greek antiquities continued during much of the nineteenth century, though a sense of scholarly interest gradually replaced the love of collecting. By the end of the century the archaeology of classical Greece was at last put on a more secure basis by large-scale excavations, both foreign and Greek-led, at Athens, Delos, Delphi, Corinth, and Olympia.

FIGURE 1.2 Victim of falling ash at the Roman city of Pompeii in southern Italy, destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79. Werner Forman Archive/Getty Images.



Egypt

Greece and Rome were in one sense accessible to Western scholars even before archaeology. Their writings—histories, literature, and plays—were in Greek and Latin, which could still be read. For other civilizations, however, access was more difficult since knowledge of both the languages and the scripts in which they had been written was lost. Decipherment, breaking the code of these forgotten writings, was a critical first step.

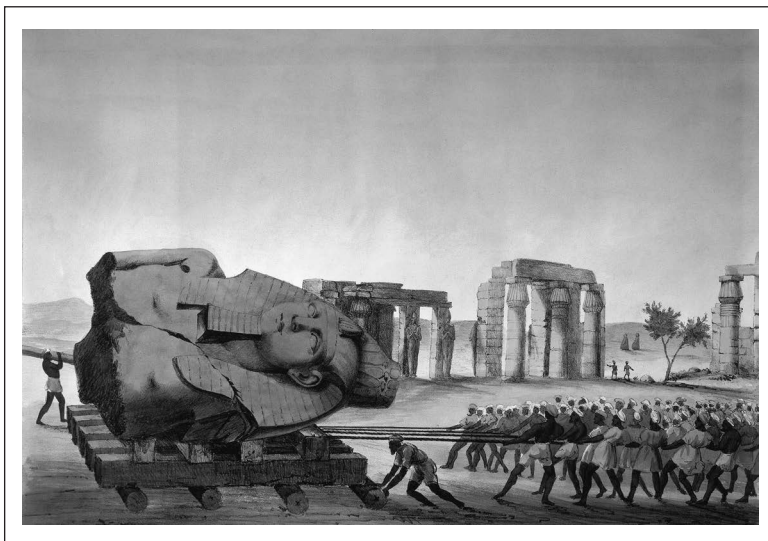
Decipherment played a transformative role in the exploration of the civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia. The Greeks and Romans always considered Egypt as the cradle of human civilization. Roman tourists visited the Nile Valley, pausing to admire the Pyramids of Giza (see Box 4.1) and the temples of Thebes (Luxor). But few later travelers ventured to Egypt until the nineteenth century since it was an obscure province of the Ottoman Empire and effectively off-limits to Christians. The occasional traveler drew the pyramids or purchased powdery remains of Egyptian mummies, which were said to be a powerful medicine and aphrodisiac. Egyptian hieroglyphs and mummies caused intense interest in European scholarly circles because of the close association between the Land of the Pharaohs and the Old Testament. But it was not until Egypt assumed strategic importance during the Napoleonic Wars that Westerners finally became familiar with Egyptian civilization.

The immediate cause was the military expedition by Napoleon Bonaparte of France, who thought that control of Egypt would give him

access to Britain's possessions in India. So he invaded the Nile Delta in 1798, wresting control of Egypt from its Ottoman governor. With characteristic thoroughness, Napoleon took with him a team of 160 scientists and technicians, known as "Napoleon's Donkeys," whose job was to record the geography, culture, and archaeology of the country. The scholars fanned out over the Nile Valley with pen and pencil—collecting, recording inscriptions, and sketching. They published their results in a magnificent multivolume work, *Description de l'Égypte* (1809–1822), which caused a sensation throughout Europe, influencing art and architecture and setting off a craze for Egyptian antiquities in the Western world (Figure 1.3). The greatest discovery of all came at the hands of some soldiers building a fortification at Rosetta in the Egyptian delta. They uncovered a stone slab bearing parallel texts in Greek and in two versions of Egyptian script, which provided the key for the eventual decipherment of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs by French scholar Jean-François Champollion in 1822.

The *Description de l'Égypte* set the stage for more than a century of spectacular archaeological discoveries, culminating in the finding of the tomb of the New Kingdom pharaoh Tutankhamun by Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon in 1922. Tutankhamun's tomb unleashed an epidemic of "Egyptomania," which has convulsed the world at intervals ever since. This mania takes many forms: a preoccupation with golden pharaohs, with the mystical, with the alleged properties of pyramid power and ancient Egyptian religion, or with the curses of royal mummies immortalized in successive Hollywood movies. Ancient Egypt continues to captivate the popular imagination in ways that few other civilizations can equal.

FIGURE 1.3 Among the adventurers who descended on the Nile in the early nineteenth century was Giovanni Belzoni (1778–1823), a former circus strongman, seen here transporting a head of pharaoh Ramesses II to the Nile. Hirarchivum Press/Alamy Stock Photo



Mesopotamian Civilizations: Assyrians and Sumerians

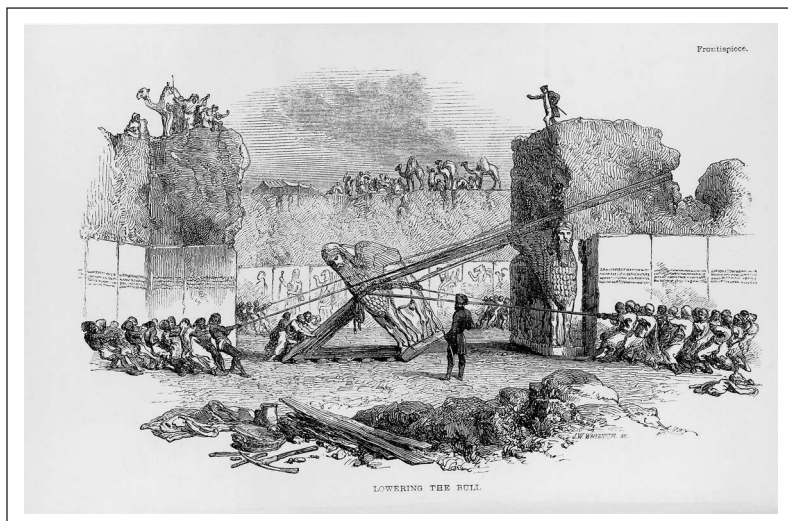
Among the greatest archaeological discoveries of the nineteenth century were those at Nimrud, Nineveh, and other ancient Mesopotamian cities. Until Frenchman Paul-Émile Botta and Englishman Austen Henry Layard dug into Nineveh in northern Iraq in the 1840s, however, the Assyrians of the Old Testament were only a shadowy presence on the historical stage. Layard, a young man with a taste for adventure and a hunger for fame and fortune, dreamed of romantic discoveries while standing atop the dusty mounds of Nineveh:

Visions of palaces underground, of gigantic monsters, of sculptured figures, and endless inscriptions, floated before me. After forming plan after plan for removing the earth, and extricating these treasures, I fancied myself wandering in a maze of chambers from which I could find no outlet. Then again, all was reburied, and I was standing on the grass-covered mound.

(Layard 1849, 111)

Layard worked first at Nimrud in 1845, and later, from 1849, at Nineveh (Figure 1.4). Meanwhile Botta had been appointed French consul to Mosul in 1840 specifically so he could dig at Nineveh, directly across the Tigris River, and acquire antiquities for the Louvre in Paris. He was also the first to unearth an Assyrian palace at nearby Khorsabad. Both men uncovered spectacular bas-reliefs of great kings and their courtiers, of armies marching out to conquest, of slaves laboring on great palaces, even of scenes from a royal lion hunt (already described) and the siege of Lachish in Israel, mentioned in II Kings 18:14. When a team of scholars, among them cavalry-officer-turned-linguist Henry Creswicke Rawlinson, deciphered cuneiform, the Mesopotamian script with its wedge-shaped characters, Layard could read King Sennacherib's boast before Lachish: "Sennacherib, mighty king, king of the country of Assyria,

FIGURE 1.4 Austen Henry Layard supervises the removal of a winged bull from an Assyrian palace at Nimrud in northern Iraq in 1847. DEA Picture Library/De Agostini/Getty Images

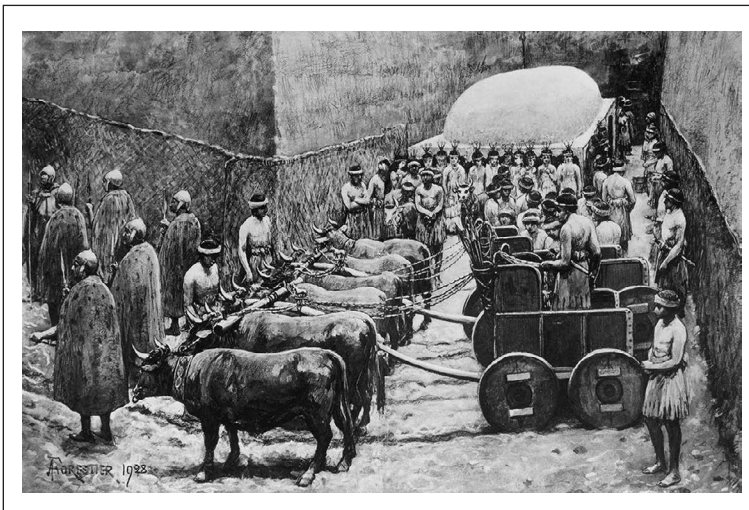


sitting on the throne of judgement, before the city of Lachish. I gave orders for its slaughter.” Layard’s discoveries also included the royal archives of the Assyrian monarch Assurbanipal, which were to throw light on the origins of creation legends in the first chapter of Genesis.

Although the clay tablets from Assurbanipal’s library revealed the existence of a much earlier civilization in southern Mesopotamia, it was not until French diplomat Ernest de Sarzec excavated the Telloh mounds in 1877 that the existence of such an earlier urban society was confirmed. This “Sumerian” civilization, as it came to be known, did not catch the popular imagination until 1922, the year of the Tutankhamun discovery, when British archaeologist Leonard Woolley began digging at biblical Ur. His were large-scale excavations, directed by an archaeologist with a brilliant imagination and the ability to share his discoveries with a wide audience, not least because he was able to export the finest objects to museums in London and Philadelphia. In 1926, he unearthed a huge Sumerian cemetery containing sixteen “royal” tombs and thousands of commoners’ graves. Working with shoe-string budgets, Woolley excavated a great death pit, where, he claimed, an entire royal court took poison and lay down to die with their mistress (though recent re-analysis of the remains suggests that their deaths to be less voluntary and more violent) (Figure 1.5). The Royal Graves at Ur caused almost as great a sensation as Tutankhamun’s tomb and stimulated a new level of interest in the first city-dwellers of southern Mesopotamia.

Decades of persistent and dedicated work by archaeologists of many nationalities have assembled the rich picture of ancient Mesopotamian society that we possess today. Much still remains to be done, especially in less-well-studied areas such as Anatolia. It is salutary to reflect that the Hittites, one of the major peoples of ancient Southwest Asia, were hardly known until German excavations at Boghazköy, their capital, in 1906–1908. Subsequently,

FIGURE 1.5 Reconstruction of the “Royal Grave” of Pu-abi at Ur in southern Iraq, excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley in 1922. Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans.



French discoveries at Mari on the Euphrates (from 1933); Italian excavations at Ebla (from 1964); American investigations at Tell Leilan, Tell al-Raqa'i, and neighboring sites (from 1978); and British excavations at Tell Brak (1937–1938, resumed in 1976) have thrown new light on important early developments in northern Mesopotamia and Syria, away from the south Mesopotamian heartland. Such discoveries, and the promise of so much more as yet undiscovered history, make the terrible devastation and destruction that has been visited on the cultural patrimony in this region in recent years a distressing part of the human tragedy of these conflicts.

Greece and Crete: Minoans and Mycenaeans

The late nineteenth century also saw the first exploration of the Bronze Age civilizations of Greece and Crete, at the hands of some remarkable archaeologists, such as German millionaire businessman Heinrich Schliemann:

I am fatigued and have an immense desire to withdraw from excavations and to pass the rest of my life quietly. I feel I cannot stand any longer this tremendous work. Besides, wherever I hitherto put the spade into the ground, I always discovered new worlds for archaeology at Troy, Mycenae, Orchomenos, Tiryns—each of them has brought to light new wonders.

(Schliemann 1885, 22)

Obsessed since childhood with Greek legend, Schliemann retired from business in his forties and devoted the rest of his life to archaeology and to proving that Homer's poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were the literal historical truth.

Schliemann's main accomplishment lies in his excavations at the Hissarlik mound on the Dardanelles in modern Turkey, which both he and a local British resident named Frank Calvert identified as Homeric Troy. The aim was nothing less than the verification of Homeric legend, which told of a ten-year war led by the Bronze Age Greeks against the city of Troy at the mouth of the Dardanelles in modern Turkey. The story forms the background to the great epic poem the *Iliad*, written by Homer in the eighth century B.C. Schliemann and his Greek wife, Sophia, excavated Hissarlik on an enormous scale in the early 1870s and uncovered no fewer than seven superimposed cities. He claimed that a thick layer of burnt masonry and ashes, the second city from the base, was the Homeric Troy destroyed by the Greeks. At first Schliemann scarcely understood the significance of what he had found at Troy, but most people were convinced (and remain so today) that he had indeed discovered the city described in the legend.

The Greek leader identified by Homer as the leader of the expedition to Troy was Agamemnon, king of Mycenae in southern Greece. Buoyed up by his successes at Hissarlik and convinced that Agamemnon was a real historical figure, Schliemann turned his attention across the Aegean to the site of Mycenae itself in 1874. There he discovered the spectacular Shaft Graves and the skeletons of nineteen men and women adorned with opulent jewelry and other offerings, some wearing golden masks (see Figure 9.7). Schliemann proclaimed to the world that he had found Agamemnon's grave. While that identification was premature and incorrect, he had had certainly uncovered Bronze Age Mycenaean civilization.

Greek legend also told of a shadowy early civilization on Crete, associated with a king named Minos. This had to wait longer than Mycenae for its rediscovery. The principal discovery was the palace of Knossos, its remains buried beneath a great mound of debris. English archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans was attracted to the site in the 1890s by carved Cretan seal-stones bearing a curious script, which he had purchased from antiquities dealers in the Athens flea market. Evans tracked down the source of these seal-stones to Knossos, and in 1900 began excavations there that were to continue at intervals for more than thirty years. He was not the first person to excavate at Knossos—a local Cretan scholar had worked there some years before—but with the greater resources available to him, he was the first to demonstrate the full significance of this important site. The palace was a confusing huddle of courtyard, staircases, storerooms, and small chambers, with residential areas and public rooms, often decorated with vivid friezes. Evans saw this as the labyrinthine residence of King Minos himself and named the civilization that it represented *Minoan*.

The Minoans traded with the Egyptians, with the Greek mainland, and with eastern Mediterranean states. From these contacts they learned of writing systems, and went on to develop their own, known as Linear A. Inscribed on clay tablets, Linear A seems to have recorded economic and administrative information, but the language used is otherwise unknown and has never been deciphered. However, Knossos yielded many more tablets in a different and slightly later script, Linear B. To his eternal regret, Arthur Evans never deciphered Linear B either. It was only in 1953, twelve years after Evans's death, that Michael Ventris announced his discovery that some of the tablets represented an early form of Greek, and unlike Linear A could thus be deciphered. The reading of the Linear B tablets has thrown considerable light on the administration of the palace of Knossos in its latter days, as well as on Mycenaean palaces on the Greek mainland, which also used the script.

The Indus and East Asia

The archaeological discovery of early civilizations in South Asia and the Far East is the work of the twentieth century. Excavations by British and Indian archaeologists at the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro in 1921 first revealed the existence of a hitherto unsuspected Bronze Age civilization in the Indus Valley of what is now Pakistan. Harappa and Mohenjo-daro have remained the best-known sites, but they are now recognized to be only two among over a dozen large settlements of the Indus civilization. Unfortunately, no one has yet succeeded in deciphering the enigmatic Indus script, which appears on square seal-stones and copper plates.

The 1920s were a key period in the investigation of early Chinese civilization, too. Chinese historical records of later periods spoke of a Shang dynasty, which had ruled northern China during the second millennium B.C. Little more was known of it, however, until 1899, when a collection of cattle shoulder blades bearing an early form of Chinese script was traced to the site of Anyang in the Huanghe valley. To that extent the story of the discovery parallels that of the Minoan civilization of Crete. In the Chinese case, however, the first excavations at Anyang had to wait until 1928. Once begun, under the direction of Chinese archaeologist Li Chi, they revealed an amazing record of

wealthy royal graves and palace platforms, giving archaeological substance to the shadowy historical Shang. Work has continued at Anyang and other Shang centers up to the present day, illustrating the special character of this earliest Chinese state. Recent discoveries have also thrown light on developments in other regions of China, where distinctive regional traditions emerged in parallel with the Shang.

The Americas: Mesoamerica

Even as Paul-Émile Botta and Austen Henry Layard labored on Assyrian cities, Boston historian William Prescott was studying ancient American civilizations. He started with the accounts of Spanish conquistadors, who were astounded by the sophistication of Aztec civilization in the Mexican highlands.

When we saw so many cities and villages built in the water and other great towns on dry land and that straight and level causeway going towards Mexico [Tenochtitlán], we were amazed and said that it was like the enchantments they tell of in the legends of Aamadis, on account of the great towers . . . and buildings rising from the water, and all built of masonry. And some of our soldiers even asked whether the things we saw were not a dream.

(Bernal Díaz *True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (1568) 1963, 118)

So wrote conquistador Bernal Díaz of the Spaniards' first sight of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán. When Hernán Cortés and his soldiers arrived before Tenochtitlán in 1519, they were met with the sight not of an archaeological ruin but of a great preindustrial city in full vitality. Here was a Native American empire with architecture, writing, and metallurgy and with great temple-pyramids and organized systems of warfare, government, and taxation.

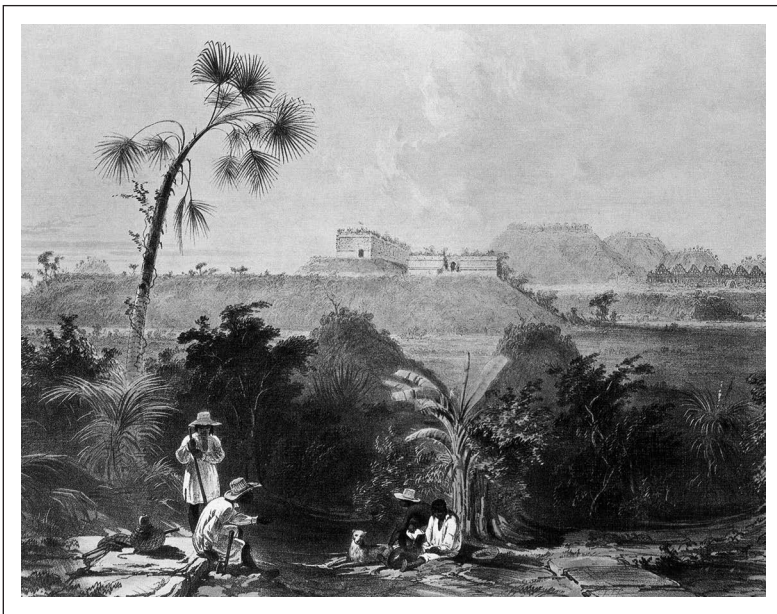
Unfortunately, Cortés and his men embarked on an orgy of destruction, which effectively banished Aztec civilization into historical oblivion. A colonial capital, Mexico City, rose on the ruins of Tenochtitlán, burying the great pre-Columbian city under urban sprawl. In the century following the fall of Tenochtitlan, a few Spanish priests gathered oral traditions and written accounts of the once-great civilization. Their researches have preserved a priceless, but alas incomplete, archive of Aztec culture for modern scholars.

The conquistadors were colonists and conquerors, people who came to the Americas to "serve God and get rich." Catholic friars destroyed Aztec cult objects and priceless written codices (illustrated documents) to obliterate all traces of "pagan" beliefs. Sympathetic study of the traditions and history of the conquered peoples was not encouraged, unless it facilitated the colonial goals of conversion to Christianity and incorporation into the Spanish regime. It was not until the nineteenth century that both American and Mexican scholars probed historical and native sources and began to write not only about the Aztecs but also about much earlier Mesoamerican civilizations. William Prescott's romanticized masterpiece *The Conquest of Mexico* (1843) became a best-seller, the first account of early Mesoamerican civilizations based on both archival and archaeological sources. That he could use archaeology at all was because of two remarkable travelers, American lawyer John Lloyd Stephens

and English artist Frederick Catherwood. Together they made two difficult journeys (1839–1840 and 1841–1842) into the jungles of lowland Mexico and Guatemala, visiting and drawing the ruins of Maya centers like Copán, Palenque, Chichen Itzá, and Uxmal. Catherwood was a brilliant artist, capable of producing pictures as accurate as photographs (Figure 1.6). Stephens was a vivid writer. Together, they published their discoveries in two disarmingly entitled volumes: *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán* (1841) and *Incidents of Travel in Yucatán* (1843). These revealed the spectacular Maya civilization to an astonished world.

Over the next forty years, explorers continued to visit the region, including characters such as Augustus Le Plongeon who created spectacular photographic records of Maya art and architecture while speculating that they originated from lost civilizations. British archaeologist Sir Alfred P. Maudslay produced the first general study of Maya archaeology in four volumes between 1889 and 1902. Part of this publication was a long appendix on Maya inscriptions, with illustrations by Annie G. Hunter. Excavation and interpretation of Maya sites have been major areas of archaeological research in the century since Maudslay, but the greatest breakthrough has been made only within the last fifty years, with the decipherment of Maya glyphs. It wasn't until the 1960s that Maya script was understood to record historical events, and the pace of decipherment really accelerated in the 1980s. The texts have now forced a complete reassessment of earlier understandings of Maya rulership and political organization, as it has become possible to read accounts of fierce warfare between rulers and cities, not unlike those of Mesopotamia or, indeed, many other parts of the ancient world.

FIGURE 1.6 The Maya center at Uxmal in Mexico, painted by Frederick Catherwood in 1844. De Agostini/Getty Images.

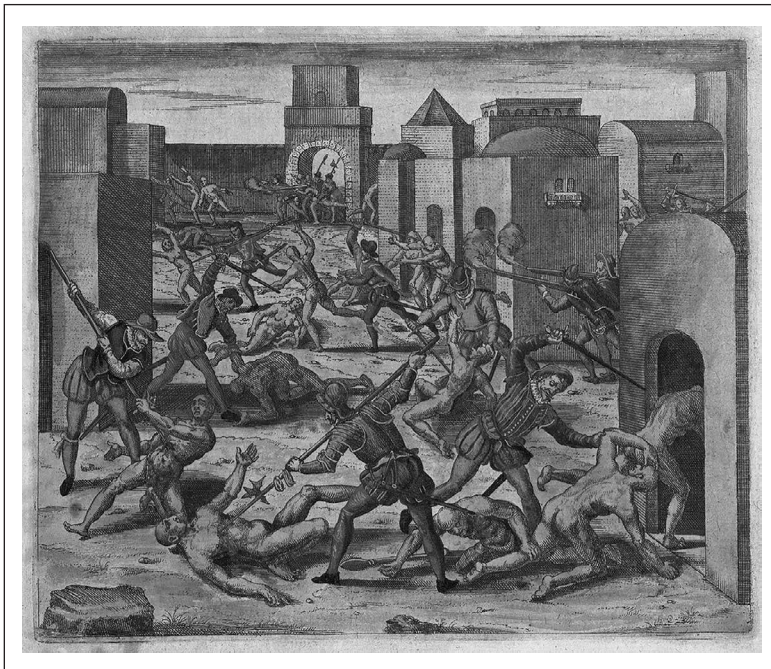


The Americas: Peru

The Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán had been conquered a decade before, when another Spanish adventurer, Francisco Pizarro, encountered the Inka ruler Atahualpa high in the Andes foothills in 1532. Pizarro and his small band of soldiers succeeded in capturing Atahualpa, then held him for ransom against a roomful of gold. Although a steadfast resistance was maintained for decades by a small group of Inka nobles, the empire soon collapsed and the Spanish consolidated their rule. The Inka capital, Cusco, lay in the highlands, connected to all parts of the royal domains by a network of roads and couriers (Figure 1.7). The conquistadors stripped Cusco's temples of their gold and set out to obliterate all traces of a "pagan" civilization, just as their predecessors had done in Mexico. Only a handful of Spanish and native scholars preserved some memories of Inka civilization, but nothing like the rich material saved in Mesoamerica.

Four centuries passed before scientists explored the spectacular Inka ruins of the Andes and even earlier monuments on the arid Peruvian coast. Two names stand out in particular: German scholar Max Uhle, who first revealed the time-depth of South American civilization in his excavations at Pachacamac on the southern Peruvian coast in 1896–1897; and the more famous Indiana Jones-like figure of the American scholar Hiram Bingham. Archaeologist and historian, Bingham set off from Cusco in July 1911 in search of the "lost city of Vilcabamba," the citadel where the Inka made their last stand against the Spanish. Instead, what he visited (a mere five days later!) was the ruins

FIGURE 1.7 The capture of the Inka capital of Cusco in Peru in 1533, from an engraving published in Frankfurt in 1602. Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin.



of Machu Picchu, a small but spectacularly preserved Inka hilltop town (see Figure 19.11). What had saved it from destruction was its remote setting. Only 97 kilometers (60 miles) from Cusco, it had never been found by the Spanish and had never suffered destruction at their hands. It was only when a local farmer led Bingham to Machu Picchu that the stunning ruins were revealed to the wider world.

The discovery of Machu Picchu stands as one of the last pioneer explorations of the ancient civilizations. Much still remains to be discovered, however—witness the spectacular finds of recent years, among them the Bronze Age shipwreck at Uluburun off the coast of southern Turkey, which contained artifacts from nine areas of Southwest Asia (Chapter 9). And when archaeologists working at Sipán in the Lambayeque Valley of northern coastal Peru unearthed a series of gold-laden Moche warrior-priest burials in 1989, they recovered the richest unlooted tombs ever excavated in the Americas (see Box 18.1).

Discoveries like those at Sipán and Uluburun are dramatic; they make the headlines and grab the popular imagination. But less-spectacular discoveries can be just as informative, if not more so. Royal burials and richly adorned palaces illuminate the lives of kings and queens, the privileged elites who ruled different civilizations. Sometimes the most telling clues come from the commonplace to find, from an obscure ancient inscription, or from a well-preserved hut floor. It is then that we learn about the commoners, the slaves, the humble artisans who lived out their lives in quiet anonymity, in the shadow of great rulers and sometimes world-changing events. The ancient civilizations were built on the labors of thousands of faceless people who tilled the land, built temples, created artistic masterpieces, and traveled long distances in the service of the state. Their lives come down to us in silent, dispassionate artifacts and food remains; in the foundations of small dwellings; and from the fills of storage pits. With the benefit of such insights into the everyday existence of ordinary individuals, archaeology presents a more balanced view of the societies that built the Pyramids of Giza, created the great Mexican city of Teotihuacán, and laid out royal mausolea in Southeast Asia that replicated the mythic Hindu world.

THE THREAT TO ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

Such architectural masterpieces, built by long-dead hands, are the common cultural heritage of us all. But they are constantly under threat from unscrupulous looters and industrial development, from the ravages of civil war and air pollution, and from the busy feet of package tourists. The ancient civilizations are under siege from modern society in ways that we may sometimes be powerless to control.

Tragically, much of the damage is deliberate—for example, the stripping of sites and burials of fine artworks and inscriptions by professional looters to feed the insatiable maw of the international antiquities market. As long as some wealthy individuals in the industrialized nations are prepared to pay high prices for ancient artworks without concern for provenance or legality, there will continue to be those prepared to dig into unrecorded sites, to burgle museums, and to cut away fragments of standing monuments in order to sell them. The loss to archaeology, and to world heritage in general, is incalculable.

Recent conflict in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan has also had significant impact on the archaeology of those countries. Archaeological remains are covered by the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, and archaeologists are sometimes able to work with military forces to identify sites at risk and prevent or minimize damage. When law and order break down, however, the remains of the past are immediately at risk from pillage and destruction. Analysis of satellite imagery has shown increased levels of looting at archaeological sites in Egypt from 2009, at the time of the global economic crisis, and particularly after the civil disturbances associated with the Arab Spring in 2011. Some of the material found its way onto the international antiquities market. The lack of digital records or imagery of material held in many museums has made it difficult for the legitimate authorities to identify and recover items that have been stolen. The problem becomes even more acute in the case of archaeological sites where heavy machinery has sometimes been used to recover saleable objects, with no regard to the damage caused to buried buildings and structures, nor to the priceless information that can be gained from a proper study of the contexts of these discoveries. Increased looting of archaeological sites was one consequence of the recent conflict in Iraq and Syria. Sales of antiquities were used to fund insurrection, but coupled with this was the public destruction of famous archaeological sites and monuments for ideological and propaganda purposes. In 2014, for example, the forces of the so-called “Islamic State” captured the city of Mosul in northern Iraq. A few months later, video footage showed the wanton destruction of priceless Assyrian sculptures and relief carvings from the palaces at Nimrud, on the outskirts of the modern city. The desert city of Palmyra, with its elegant colonnaded main streets, suffered similar intentional damage under Islamic State control (Figure 1.8). This was not the first time in recent decades that such destruction had occurred. In 2001,

FIGURE 1.8 Damaged remains of the ancient desert city of Palmyra in Syria, recaptured from so-called Islamic State in April 2016. Xinhua/Alamy Stock Photo.



the Taliban in Afghanistan dynamited the famous rock-cut Buddha statues at Bamiyan, considered by many to be one of the wonders of the ancient world. Such public acts of cultural destruction are testimony to the power and significance that the remains of ancient civilizations still hold today, and to their intrinsic vulnerability.

Summary

In this chapter we have considered alternative meanings of the term *civilization* and have seen how it must be divorced from ideas of cultural progress or superiority. Early civilizations share many important features, including urbanization and state-level sociopolitical organization. Other features, such as writing and metallurgy, are common but not universal to early civilizations. The rediscovery of early civilizations has been a gradual

process, beginning in the sixteenth century with the European Renaissance and the arrival of Spanish conquistadors in the New World. Discoveries such as the tomb of Tutankhamun, the Royal Graves at Ur, and the Moche Lords of Sipán kept civilizations in the headlines throughout the twentieth century, but looting and destruction cast a shadow of concern over the future fate of many of the major sites and monuments.

Notes

- 1 Archaeologists conventionally use the term *Andean* to describe the culture area encompassing highland and lowland Peru and adjacent areas where civilization developed in South America. *Mesoamerica* refers to that area of highland and lowland Central America from Mexico to Guatemala where civilization developed.
1. The Early Dynastic (ED) period is itself subdivided. Early Dynastic I is dated approximately to 2900–2700 B.C., the period of the kings who reigned “before the Flood”; Early Dynastic II, 2700–2600 B.C.; and Early Dynastic III, 2600–2334 B.C.
1. *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia, etc.* 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1822). N.B: 1818 is the date of Porter’s visit to Babylon.
1. A confusing feature of Aegean Bronze Age chronology is the use of two separate systems of terminology. The first is based mainly on pottery styles and is divided simply into Early (3200–2100 B.C.), Middle (2100–1700 B.C.), and Late (1700–1050 B.C.). The mainland sequences are labeled Helladic—thus Early Helladic (EH), Middle Helladic (MH), and Late Helladic (LH); those of the Cyclades are labeled Cycladic (EC, MC, LC); and those of Crete, Minoan (EM, MM, LM).
- Alongside this system is an alternative periodization based on the Minoan palaces, beginning with the Prepalatial period (3200–2100 B.C.). This is followed by the First Palace, or Protopalatial, period (2100–1700 B.C.), corresponding to the first Cretan palaces to the period of their destruction by earthquake c. 1700 B.C. Then follows the Second Palace, or Neopalatial, period (1700–1450 B.C.), which ends with the destruction of the Cretan palaces and the beginnings of Mycenaean control at Knossos. The Third Palace period runs from 1450 B.C. to the fall of the mainland Mycenaean palaces in 1200 B.C. The final phase in this system is the Postpalatial period, from 1200 to 1050 B.C.
2. The conventional classification scheme, based on vessel forms and decoration, is as follows: Middle Minoan IA, IB, IIA, IIB, IIIA, IIIB; Late Minoan IA, IB, II, IIIA1, IIIA2, IIIB, IIIC.
3. Mycenaean pottery classifications are complex. In pottery terms the

Mycenaean civilization comes under the Late Helladic (LH) Period, to distinguish it from the Late Minoan (LM) of Crete and the Late Cycladic (LC) of the islands. Late Helladic is subdivided into three major units (LH I, II, and III), and these again into smaller divisions (LH IIA, IIB; LH IIIA1, IIIA2, IIIB1, IIIB2; IIIC; with regional and site-specific subdivisions) from the evidence of pottery shapes and decorations. There is a large literature on the subject, and these pottery styles are generally taken to represent successive time periods of around fifty years, though some (e.g., LH IIIB2) are not present in all areas.

1. There are a number of conflicting schemes for Etruscan chronology. The one used here broadly shadows the customary scheme for classical Greece, a situation that reflects the fact that the dates of the Etruscan phases are based largely on imports of Greek painted pottery and Southwest Asian artifacts.

2. We have chosen to use the term *Archaic* to cover the whole of this period, though some authorities divide it into two, *Orientalizing* (750–600 B.C.) and *Archaic* (600–480 B.C.), while others consider the terms *Orientalizing*, *Archaic*, and *Classical* judgmental and propose that they be abandoned.

1. Eighty Roman miles equals 117 kilometers (73 twenty-first century [statute] miles).

1. Lionel Casson, trans., *The Periplus Maris Erythraei* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 63, 87, 91.

- 1 The general terminological framework for Andean archaeology varies among researchers. We have adopted what appears to be the most commonly used today, preferring the term Preceramic to Archaic.

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